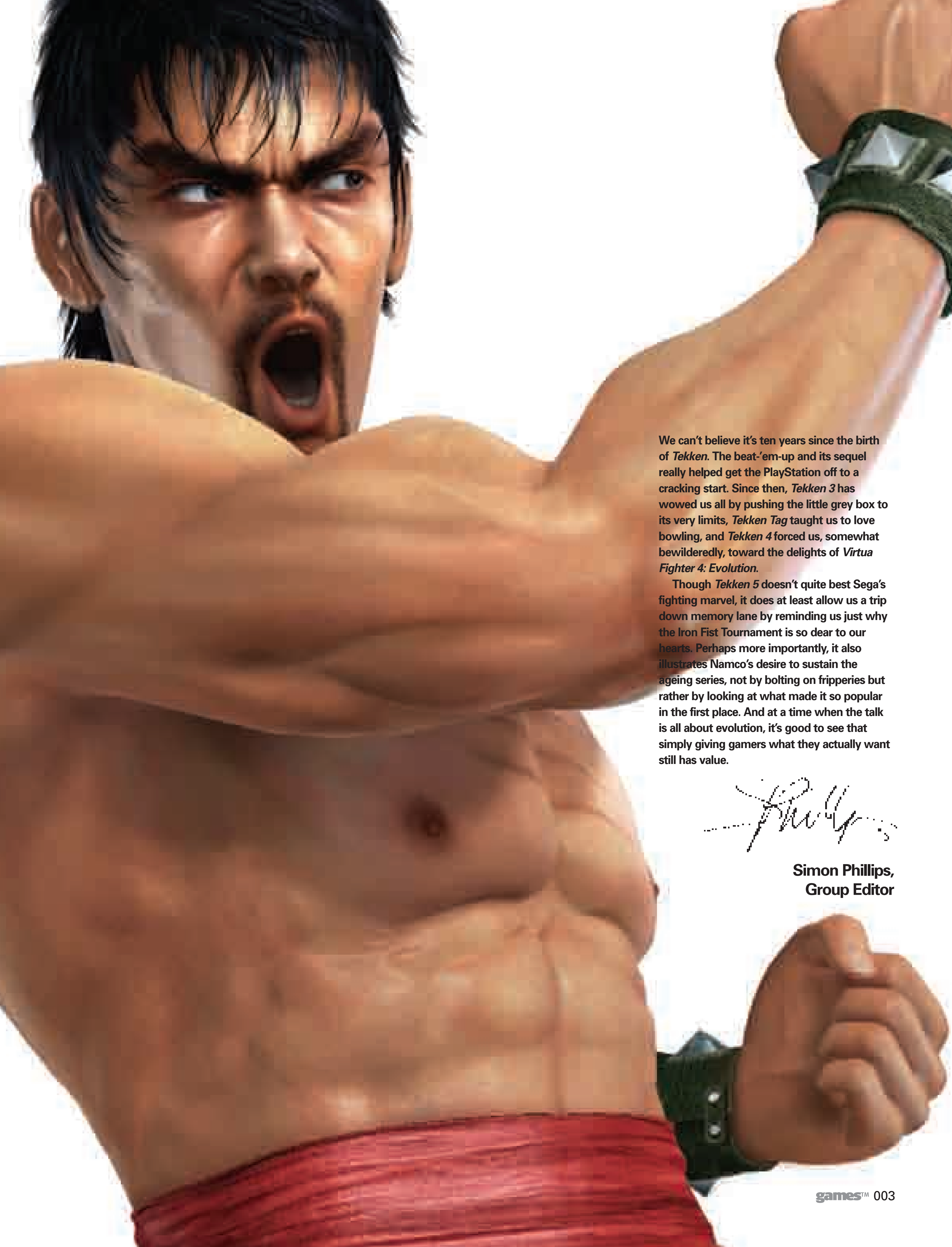

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eMag



We can't believe it's ten years since the birth of *Tekken*. The beat-'em-up and its sequel really helped get the PlayStation off to a cracking start. Since then, *Tekken 3* has wowed us all by pushing the little grey box to its very limits, *Tekken Tag* taught us to love bowling, and *Tekken 4* forced us, somewhat bewilderedly, toward the delights of *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution*.

Though *Tekken 5* doesn't quite best Sega's fighting marvel, it does at least allow us a trip down memory lane by reminding us just why the Iron Fist Tournament is so dear to our hearts. Perhaps more importantly, it also illustrates Namco's desire to sustain the ageing series, not by bolting on fripperies but rather by looking at what made it so popular in the first place. And at a time when the talk is all about evolution, it's good to see that simply giving gamers what they actually want still has value.

Simon Phillips,
Group Editor



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CHUN-LI
GUILE
AKUMA
SAGAT
M. BISON
BIRDIE
SAKURA
DAN
MAI
KRAUSER
GEESE
RYO
MR. KARATE
KING
JOHN
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HAOHMARU
KASUMI
OROCHI
MATURE
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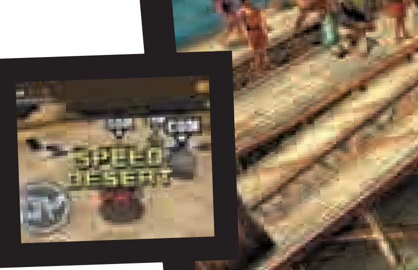


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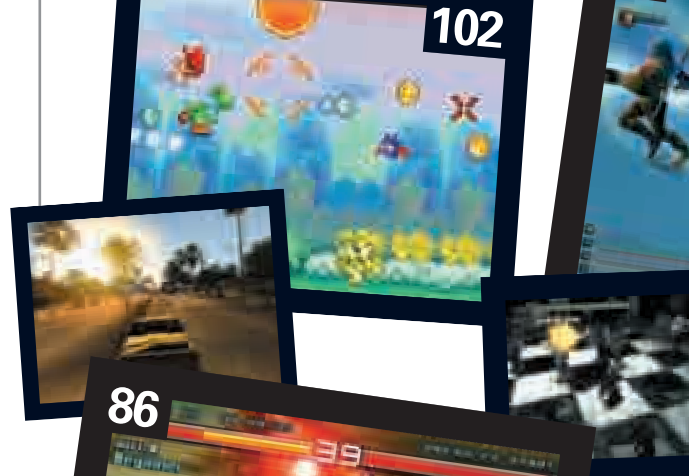
RETRO







REVIEWS





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REGULARS

NEWS

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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

TURNING JAPANESE

EXCLUSIVE TITLES TO PUSH XBOX IN THE EAST

Three prominent Japanese developers have signed deals with Microsoft, in a move that the American company hopes will secure the success of Xbox 2 in Eastern territories.

The most significant new partner for Microsoft Game Studios must surely be Hironobu Sakaguchi, president of the Mistwalker studio, former president of Square USA and the man known as 'the father of *Final Fantasy*'. Mistwalker is working on two RPGs, both of which will be exclusive to the next generation of Xbox. This represents a concerted effort by Microsoft to appeal to gamers in Japan and other Eastern territories where the Xbox has failed to take off.

Peter Moore, corporate vice president of worldwide marketing and publishing at Microsoft, seemed pleased by the news. "Sakaguchi has taken role-playing games – traditionally a niche market – and introduced them to a broad and diverse audience across the globe," he enthused. "We are ecstatic to work with Sakaguchi and celebrate what this news means not only for Xbox, but for gamers worldwide."

The other big names to join up are Game Republic founder and former Capcom director Yoshiki Okamoto, and Tetsuya Mizuguchi, formerly of Sega and now president of Q Entertainment. Between them, the two have worked on titles such as *Resident Evil*, *Street Fighter*, *Sega Rally*, *Rez* and PSP title *Lumines*.

These partnerships must come as a blow to Sony and Nintendo as they mean Microsoft has exclusive rights to some of the best brains in the business. Even if Sakaguchi's RPGs fail to give Xbox 2 a foothold in the East, gamers around the world will be keen to see what he – along with Okamoto and Mizuguchi – will do.

“WE ARE **ECSTATIC TO WORK** WITH SAKAGUCHI AND CELEBRATE WHAT THIS NEWS MEANS NOT ONLY FOR XBOX, BUT **FOR GAMERS WORLDWIDE**”

NEXT BOX

THE RUMOUR MILL GRINDS OUT MORE BITE-SIZE CHUNKS

REMOVABLE HARD DRIVE

Online reports – the finest source of spurious ‘hard news’ – are suggesting that the next generation of Xbox will feature a removable hard drive. This has already been alluded to by Microsoft, as it has told developers there will be a mass storage device for Xbox 2 but that it should not be relied on for games. The rumour that’s long held ground is that Xbox 2 will be available with or without the hard drive, allowing for a cheaper entry-level console to hit the market, giving owners the option to upgrade with a hard drive later. It’s been presumed that the storage device will be in the form of either a sealed memory unit or a flash cart, but this in itself leads to further speculation that the mass storage device itself will house a screen and buttons and serve as a media player.



Will memory storage take the form of an ‘xPod’?

WIRELESS CONTROLLERS

Microsoft representatives have confirmed that Xbox 2 will ship with wireless controllers as standard. Developers who have been working with prototype hardware have also confirmed this. Although no final designs of the controller have been unveiled, the pads are believed to look similar to the Controller S, avoiding the furore over the original Xbox pad with its design that was considered too large to be comfortable. However, no-one is willing to spill the beans on the situation regarding the batteries powering the controllers and, in particular, if these new pads will support a rumble feature. It’s also difficult to see how the Controller S pad can stay true to its original design without some element compensating for the wireless feature. Given the patchy information thus far, it’s hard to predict how well received this news will be, but as Nintendo’s WaveBird has proved, there’s definitely a market for pads without wires.



The GameCube’s Wavebird has been a hit.

OUR TWO CENTS

While no-one seems to know the name of Microsoft’s next console – Xbox 360, NextBox and xPod are a few of the current unlikely candidates – it’s impossible to ignore the company’s push to make Xbox 2 a success in Japan. The lack of support from Japanese developers and publishers for Xbox ended the Eastern charge before it began, with the absence of Square Enix on the black and green console typical of Microsoft’s failure to court the appropriate names. However, despite Microsoft’s early retreat from the first battle to woo the Japanese public, it seems the company withdrew with more than a bloody nose. Experience has taught it that developers are key, and with Mistwalker on board it can be argued Xbox 2 has already secured itself the next best thing to Square Enix. It won’t guarantee the victory Microsoft is looking for but it will be a start – and undeniably an improvement on the situation the Xbox has found itself in.



Microsoft may attempt some rebranding to win over Eastern gamers, but will that be enough?

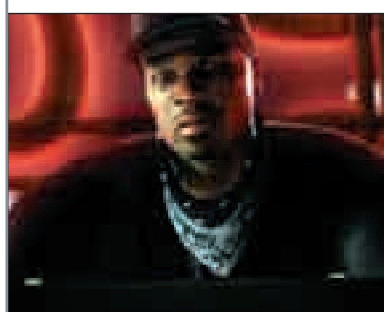


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



FIND HIM IN THE CLUB

He's no MC Harvey, but 50 Cent and a selection of other US rappers (including Dr Dre and various members of G-Unit) will be lending their music, voices and likenesses to a new videogame. Entitled *50 Cent: Bulletproof*, the only details on the game so far come from a teaser trailer released on MTV.com, showing the man himself chasing someone through a skyscraper, shooting at people and generally being straight built for beef. "I'm out to destroy the competition and my videogame is no different," he said. Quite.





THE SHOW MUST GO ON

After dabbling with movies, comic books and animation, Square Enix has announced the production of a new variety-based TV show in Japan. Due to begin airing on 6 April, *Heavy Metal Thunder* (yes, really) will feature a mixture of guests and music. J-idol Yoko Kumada will front the show, which will appear in TV Tokyo's popular post-midnight timeslot. Even more strange, however, is the news that Square Enix is rumoured to be making a game based on the programme…



VIVA LA REVOLUTION?

CANDID COMMENTS REVEAL NINTENDO'S STRONG IDEALS

The next generation of videogaming hardware will be a true turning point for the industry, with consumers having the final say on whether it's the frivolity of improved graphics or a more substantial kind of innovation that succeeds – so says a bullish Nintendo.

Speaking to UK industry publication *MCV*, Nintendo president Satoru Iwata made it quite clear that the Japanese giant isn't planning on compromising its ideals in order to win gamers over with a 'me too' approach to its next console, currently dubbed Revolution. "Nintendo doesn't believe simply beefing up current-gen consoles will create a bright future, but it seems like the other players believe completely the opposite," Iwata said. "Which one is correct shall become clear in the next couple of years, [but] the answer shall be provided not by the industry, but by current games fans and also those who are not very avid gamers."



Iwata has spoken frankly about the Revolution.



The new *Zelda* marks a new direction for Nintendo.

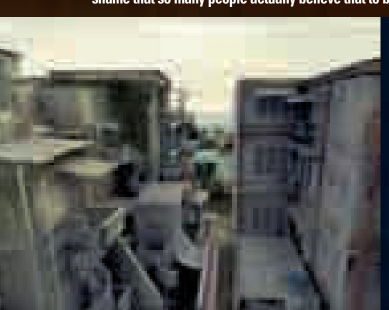
Such a perspective makes it easy to see the two paths that Nintendo believes are lying ahead for the industry: a homogenised production line where enhanced graphics are used to cover up the same old ideas, or the rekindling of that elusive creative spark that innovation generates within development circles. While Nintendo's imaginings may be slightly skewed, though, the concept is one with which it's hard to disagree if you're passionate about the quality of your games and your business; the very attitude that helped earn Nintendo the reputation it cherishes.

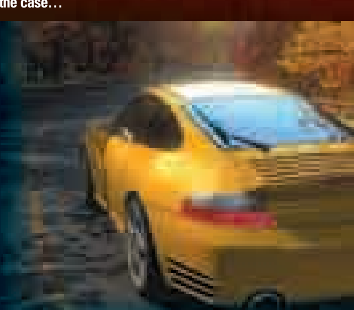
Unfortunately, not everyone feels the same way and it's because of this that many, Nintendo included, are concerned that the current lack of developer interest in the GameCube may spill over to the Revolution. "If the next-generation platforms are simply going to create even more gorgeous looking games using enhanced functionality, and if that next-gen market can expand the games industry, I'm afraid that third parties may not support Nintendo," admitted Iwata.

The problem mirrors concerns expressed by some when the company announced the DS, where the question was raised of whether third-party publishers would bother to make proper use of the handheld's functionality or just take an easy way out (as has been seen with early DS titles from the



Yes, that's right – prettier graphics mean that the gameplay must be 100 per cent better too. It's just such a shame that so many people actually believe that to be the case…





likes of Activision and EA). However, Iwata was keen to point out the possibilities if developers would only consider the opportunities open to them through such innovation.

"What we are trying to do is such a different thing, and people have come to realise that the approach we have taken with the DS can actually expand the market beyond what existing platforms can do," he said. "Therefore, I believe there should be more third parties who are willing to support Nintendo's new ideas. Publishers are afraid, even when platform holders come with next-gen consoles, of whether those consoles can appeal to people who aren't the avid game fans of today. If Nintendo can show some kind of paradigm shift in making our own new console, and if we can receive the support of the licensees, I believe we will expand third-party support."

The first step, no doubt, is the DS – not just in the hope that gamers and non-gamers will accept the handheld as a viable gaming platform, but whether developers will accept the challenge of coming up with new and interesting ways to use its innovations. After that, Nintendo's fate lies in the hands of the consumers. We hope that originality and quality win… although in a world where *Need For Speed Underground 2* rules the charts for nearly three months, we'll have to hold our breath.

"I BELIEVE THERE SHOULD BE **MORE THIRD PARTIES** WHO ARE WILLING TO **SUPPORT NINTENDO'S NEW IDEAS**"

HIT AND MISS

NINTENDO'S INNOVATIONS ARE PLENTIFUL, BUT NOT ALL OF THEM HAVE HIT THE MARK…

GAME BOY HIT
The greatest piece of handheld electronic gaming equipment ever invented – it's as simple as that.

VIRTUAL BOY MISS
Created headaches in equal doses for users (who suffered greatly from using it) and Nintendo (who cringed when it failed to sell).

WAVEBIRD HIT
Wireless pads might be commonplace now, but Nintendo's pad still stands out as the most reliable and functional.

SUPER SCOPE MISS
A complete lack of software sealed the fate of the most cumbersome and uncomfortable lightgun (or rather, light bazooka) we've ever used.

CONNECTIVITY HIT
From its origins on the N64 (plugging Game Boy cartridges into the N64 pad for *Pokémon Stadium* and *Mario Golf*) to GameCube titles like *Zelda: Four Swords* and *Crystal Chronicles*, it works incredibly well when done properly.

POKÉMON MINI MISS
Could have sold loads – if Nintendo had put it into any stores other than the single Pokémon Store in New York…



NOT ANOTHER…

PSX STORY

SONY'S MULTIMEDIA MACHINE GRINDS TO A HALT, BUT THE COMPANY KEEPS QUIET…

It probably won't come as much of a surprise to learn that after a slew of markdowns and a poor performance at retail since its release, Sony's PSX has finally ceased production. Even with the reduced prices retailers have been forced to adopt in order to shift stock, the PSX still couldn't bring forth the kind of mass convergence that Sony had envisioned.

While shutting the production lines doesn't necessarily mean the home media device is doomed, there's about as much chance of it making a drastic resurgence as there is of more than five people buying Vin Diesel action flick *xXx* on UMD. If any hopes of the unit being released outside Japan still exist after the rocky journey the PSX has endured, they are surely dashed by this news.

Never one to admit defeat, Sony's statement about the PSX's demise was somewhat curt – a single line on its Japanese website was the only signal that both models of the PSX would not be manufactured any more.

To be fair, Sony never set its hopes too high for the PSX. It was always cited as an attempt to test the water for convergence technology and this certainly won't be the end of that dream. Microsoft seems keen on convergence and Sony won't want to lose ground. To this end, we'll surely see Sony learn from its mistakes with the PlayStation 3. And what seems on the surface like another sorry failure for Sony could well turn out to be a rather helpful piece of research in the forthcoming next-gen battle.

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DANGER! HIGH VOLTAGE!

Had your Xbox long? Then you might want to take advantage of Microsoft's protective nature. Following a handful of instances where electrical failures in Xbox power cables have created potential fire risks, the company is offering to provide free replacements. Visit www.xbox.com, click on the warning banner and input your console's serial number and manufacturing date to see if your machine is at risk. "This is a preventative step we're choosing to take despite the rarity of these incidents," said Robbie Bach, Microsoft's chief Xbox officer.





GOING DOWN, DOWN(LOAD)

Pre-empting Sony's attempts to provide downloadable content for the PSP, Nintendo has finished a Japan-wide trial of a similar service for the DS. The scheme operated out of specially configured kiosks, where DS owners were able to download demos of various games and bonus materials for current titles. The full roll-out of the service is expected later in the year. However, rumours are now circulating that Nintendo plans to unveil the system at this year's E3, with special downloads available to those attending the event.





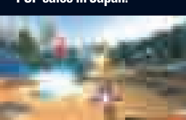
THE PSP SAGA CONTINUES

HANDS OFF



There's still no word on a European release, but hopes are high we'll see it in May.





Top games are boosting PSP sales in Japan.

In the midst of yet more PSP delays in the UK, it has been revealed that the US market has been treated to a million units for what looks set to be a spectacular launch. American gamers will be able to snap up the Value Pack for $249 (the standalone unit offered in Japan will not initially be available in the US), and there's a 20-strong launch window line-up packed with titles like *Ridge Racer*, *WipEout Pure*, *FIFA 2005* and *Need For Speed Rivals*. Also bundled with the first shipment will be *Spider-Man 2*, the first UMD movie.

Meanwhile, it's still not clear when Sony's handheld will launch in Europe. Review copies of in-house titles have already been sent out but, at the time of going to press, there's still no conclusive word on dates or pricing for the European market. An April/May release is currently predicted although it wouldn't surprise us to see the actual roll-out follow quickly after the final announcement. Launch titles are likely to follow the US line-up relatively closely although until Sony tells us more even this is uncertain.

> "IN JAPAN, THE **PSP NOW SELLS** OVER **10,000 MORE UNITS** THAN THE DS **PER WEEK**"

Things are far rosier in the PSP's Eastern homeland. Sales continue to grow and the machine now shifts an average of over ten thousand more units than the DS per week. But while this year's figures indicate a slight lead for the Nintendo handheld (with strong 2004 sales also on its side), at this rate it will only be a matter of months before it is overtaken by the PSP.

Slightly more troubling news comes with the announcement of UMD movie pricing – at the rather inflated price of ¥3,900, these fall almost directly in line with most commercial DVDs in Japan. US pricing is similarly high with a quartet of older movies (*xXx*, *Resident Evil: Apocalypse*, *Hellboy* and *Once Upon A Time In Mexico*) set to be available at $19.99, while *House Of Flying Daggers* will be the first simultaneous DVD/UMD release, priced at $28.95 for the PSP format. This is far higher than many people predicted and may put an end to the idea of much of the public buying films on both DVD and UMD, especially as Memory Sticks continue to tumble in price.

It has also been reported that 'problems' with the handheld's Square button (which Sony had previously dismissed as a deliberate design element) have been remedied – a small quantity of units suffered from unresponsive keys but this is apparently no longer the case. All US and European PSPs should be free from such issues.

SOLID SNAKE TO RETURN FOR NEXT GENERATION

KONAMI MOVES UP A GEAR

Despite suggesting that there would be "no more Metal Gear" in a recent interview with games™, Hideo Kojima has revealed at a press event in Berlin that Solid Snake will – as expected – be back. *Metal Gear Solid 4* "will be a next-generation title," he said. It will also be the first in a new series of games, with *MGS3* having completed the original trilogy.

The big news is that Kojima himself will be stepping back from the development process a little, taking on the role of executive producer while Kenichiro Imaizumi – producer of *Metal Gear Solid 3* with involvement in the likes of *Silent Hill* and *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* – takes the more hands-on role of producer. Kojima told the press that there's "no place to hide" and "no place for Hideo" (see what he did there?) and it's hoped that this internal shuffle will help keep the series fresh. To this end, Imaizumi and his team "want to feature a fresh, intriguing storyline and gameplay plus captivating graphics and more features while remaining true to the core of the *MGS* series – remaining Solid."

The game itself was actually first mentioned at a Konami financial meeting late last year – "We have some ideas and we've had them for some time now," Konami president Motoyuki Yoshioka told the conference in November – but this next-gen confirmation from the mouth of series creator Kojima puts the return of Solid Snake beyond all doubt.



Sneaking back onto a console near you soon…

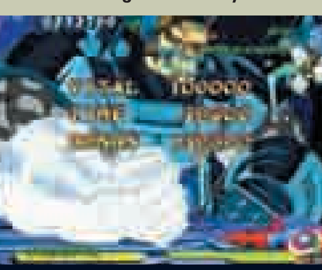
games™ THE TOP FIVE

CHEAPEST BEAT-'EM-UP BOSSES



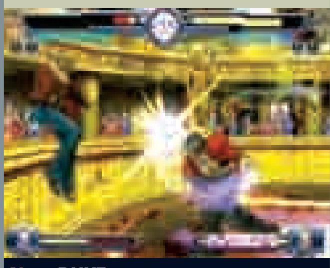
No.5 TENGU (DEAD OR ALIVE 2)

At least his long nose is funny



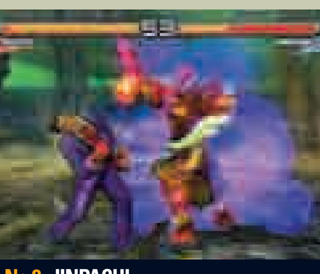
No.4 APOCALYPSE (X-MEN VS STREET FIGHTER)

Bigger isn't always better



No.3 DUKE (KOF: MAXIMUM IMPACT)

Infinite specials? No thank you



No.2 JINPACHI (TEKKEN 5)

Lose the fireball and we'll talk



No.1 GILL (STREET FIGHTER III)

So… much… chip damage…

GAMES ROOM 101

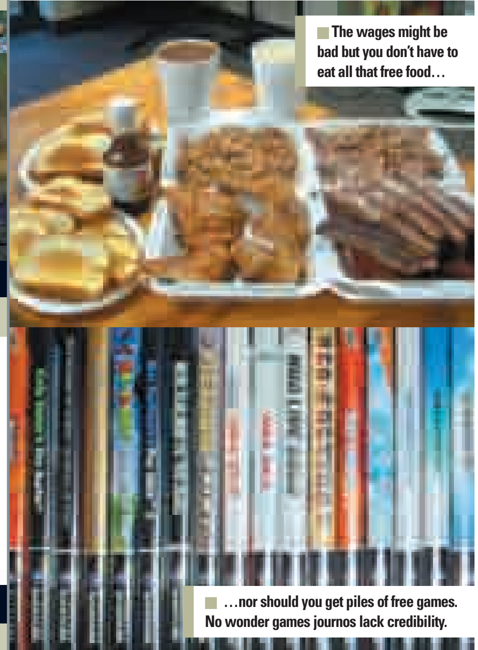
THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING



NO. 30: JOURNOS – KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Games journalism. It's not the dream job many believe it is, but it's not without its perks. However, there are those among us who would exploit these perks – and tarnish the good names of the rest of the gaming press – for their own personal gain. Sacrificing magazine integrity for backhanders; abusing the credit cards of unsuspecting PRs; filling cupboards with shrink-wrapped free tat – it's this kind of selfish lack of regard (among other factors) that has incited a lack of respect from other, more established media sectors.

Sure, it's great to get the odd game once in a while. But when you start clawing after every freebie just to 'donate' them to Gamestation's pre-owned section, you know it's time to hire a new conscience. Worse still are those unscrupulous few who are willing to put themselves before not just colleagues but entire publications. Admittedly, the buying of review scores is extremely rare (to our knowledge, at least) but when you see a rave review of an average game followed by a high-value competition from the publisher on the following spread, you can't help but ask questions…



The wages might be bad but you don't have to eat all that free food…

…nor should you get piles of free games. No wonder games journos lack credibility.

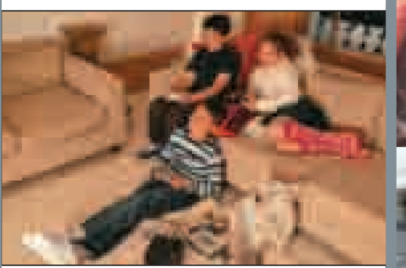
Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



FOR INSTANT PAIN RELIEF

It's official – videogames can help relieve pain. A study carried out at Adelaide Women's and Children's Hospital in Australia has found that immersion in a videogame can help to ease discomfort. Several patients with severe burns were asked to play a game while their dressings were changed, and they reported feeling less pain than usual. It may sound like a somewhat obvious discovery, but it's important nonetheless, and it helps to dispel the stories that videogames are detrimental to your health.





SALES OF THE CENTURY

Nintendo was one step closer to hitting its target of 5 million worldwide sales for the DS last month, when the Australian release of the handheld was the most successful hardware launch ever for the market, according to reports from the publisher. "The retail and consumer feedback from the Nintendo DS launch has been astounding," said Rose Lappin, sales and marketing director for Nintendo Australia. "We are eagerly awaiting the official market sales figures to fully solidify our place in the Australian marketplace as the most successful current hardware launch ever."





AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES AT THE LATEST GAMING BAFTAS

TOO MANY GONGS?



San Andreas was snubbed but *Burnout 3* got a hat trick.

With a little more focus the BAFTAs could be great.

The second annual BAFTA Games Awards in London saw *Half-Life 2* emerge as runaway winner, garnering an impressive six awards. Valve's first-person shooter ended the night with Best Game, Action Adventure, Online, PC, Art Direction and Animation honours to its name.

The other success story of the night was Criterion's *Burnout 3: Takedown*, which scooped awards for Best Racing, Technical Direction and PlayStation2 Game. Meanwhile, *Halo 2* was awarded the title of Best Xbox Game, while *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* won the award for Best GameCube Game.

Other awards included Originality (*Singstar/Singstar Party*), Children (*Donkey Konga*), Sports (*Pro Evolution Soccer 4*), Handheld (*Colin McRae Rally 2005*), Mobile (*Blue Tooth Biplanes*), Audio (*Call Of Duty: Finest Hour*) and Original Music (*Hitman: Contracts*).

The event, held on 1 March and hosted by Jonathon Ross, also saw Rockstar's Sam Houser and Leslie Benzies receive a BAFTA Special Award for their outstanding contribution to the games industry, which at least softened the blow of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*' no-show on the podium.

Grant Dean, chairman of the BAFTA Games Committee, was pleased with how the evening went, commenting, "Last year was a great year for the videogames industry. These awards reflect the enormous achievements, progress and diversity that we have seen in that time."

Unfortunately, the list of winners was so long that BAFTA ended up defeating its own agenda to "give the creative and technical specialists [in the videogames industry] the recognition they deserve." With 18 categories recognised, the abundance of the awards only served to dilute the spotlight on worthy winners.

Add some questionable decisions, such as Nintendo's first-party titles being ignored in favour of the multiformat *Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within* for the GameCube award, and the criteria has to be questioned, as does what BAFTA has actually achieved by bestowing such erratic awards.

Hopefully, next year will see a slimmer awards list so the subsequent focus can be on a select few titles that deserve it rather than the current scattershot approach. Only then will such award ceremonies grow to the levels that BAFTA is no doubt trying to encourage.

"LAST YEAR WAS A **GREAT YEAR F**OR THE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY. THESE AWARDS REFLECT **THE ENORMOUS ACHIEVEMENTS, PROGRESS AND DIVERSITY** THAT WE HAVE SEEN"

Data stream

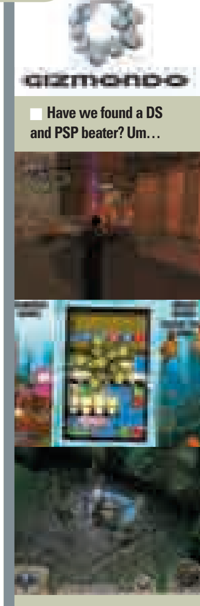
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



DOWN IN THE WATERSHED

Rockstar has found itself in hot water again, this time because TV adverts for *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* were shown at a time considered 'inappropriate' by vigilant viewers. Complaints received by the Advertising Standards Authority highlighted two adverts for the controversial, 18-rated game that were shown before 9pm; as a result, a blanket ban has been placed on *GTA* adverts being screened before the watershed. "We could understand the parents' concerns that it was inappropriate for young children to see this level of violence in advertising for a product which was only available to adults," an ASA spokesman said. "The advertising was shown in breaks around programmes which, although not designed specifically for children, were considered to be acceptable family viewing."



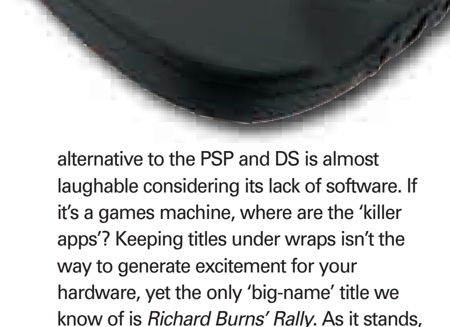


Have we found a DS and PSP beater? Um…

WHO GIZ A DAMN?



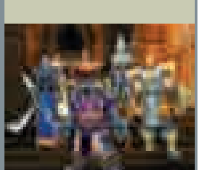
TIGER'S HANDHELD FINALLY HITS THE STREETS



By the time you read this, Tiger Telematics' Gizmondo handheld will have finally been released. Primarily selling through Tiger's specially created store on Regent Street in London as well as selected retailers, the unit costs £229 – enough to import both a DS and a PSP – while the launch games (few of which have been revealed) sell for between £9.99 and £29.99.

"Gizmondo is the British challenger in a market that will witness a spectacular boom this year," says Carl Freer, managing director of Gizmondo. "We've introduced exciting new features like GPS into gaming, and with such a remarkable list of features, the Gizmondo is the most powerful, feature-laden piece of multi-entertainment hardware available."

However, the question now is will anyone actually care? Certainly, the Gizmondo has plenty of features that will appeal to gadget fans, but the insistence on pitching it as an alternative to the PSP and DS is almost laughable considering its lack of software. If it's a games machine, where are the 'killer apps'? Keeping titles under wraps isn't the way to generate excitement for your hardware, yet the only 'big-name' title we know of is *Richard Burns' Rally*. As it stands, the Gizmondo is an overly expensive handheld with little appeal for the gaming masses – we'd love Tiger to prove us wrong, but there isn't any proof so far…



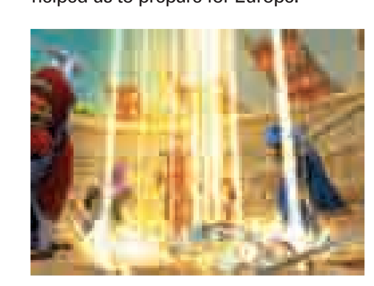
WARCRAFT RULES THE WORLD

BLIZZARD TITLE CREATES MMORPG EXPLOSION

Success was always going to be guaranteed for *World Of Warcraft*, if only because the MMORPG take on one of the most popular RTS franchises ever has been hyped through the roof since it was announced. However, with the European launch now over, the official figures are starting to roll in and they're more than a little impressive.

Based on figures released at the end of February, *World Of Warcraft* sold a massive 280,000 units on the first day of release across Europe (40,000 more than in the US) and a further 100,000 by the end of the first weekend. Additionally, the 80-plus servers made available by developer Blizzard have seen record use, with over 100,000 people playing at once on day one alone. Combined with figures from the US, that brings sales to well over 1 million in a single weekend – a number that, for a title representing such a niche market, can't be sniffed at.

"We are extremely pleased by the launch of *World Of Warcraft* in Europe," said Blizzard president Mike Morhaime. "Our experience of launching *World Of Warcraft* in North America last year has helped us to prepare for Europe."





Data stream

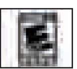
BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



MIDWAY IN THE SWIM

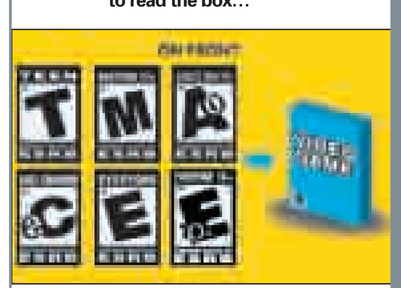
Midway has inked a deal with Cartoon Network to produce games based on a number of key licences. Those appropriate for more mature audiences are the *Adult Swim* titles including *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Sealab 2021* and *Harvey Birdman: Attorney At Law*: all great shows, but how Midway plans to turn them into games is anybody's guess. "Cartoon Network is known for creating programming that is cutting-edge in its presentation and content, and thus perfectly suited for videogames," said David Zucker, Midway's president and CEO. Um, that answers that, then.

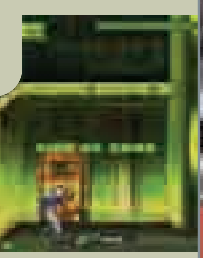




RATED E FOR EVERYONE

In a move to help clarify the difference in content between games for children and those for pre-teens, America's Entertainment Software Rating Board has introduced a new E10+ rating. Sitting between the E (Everyone) and T (Teen) ratings, E10+ is to be given to games featuring cartoon or mild violence, vaguely suggestive themes or mild instances of bad language, and will hopefully help parents to understand whether games are suitable for their children. They've just got to read the box…



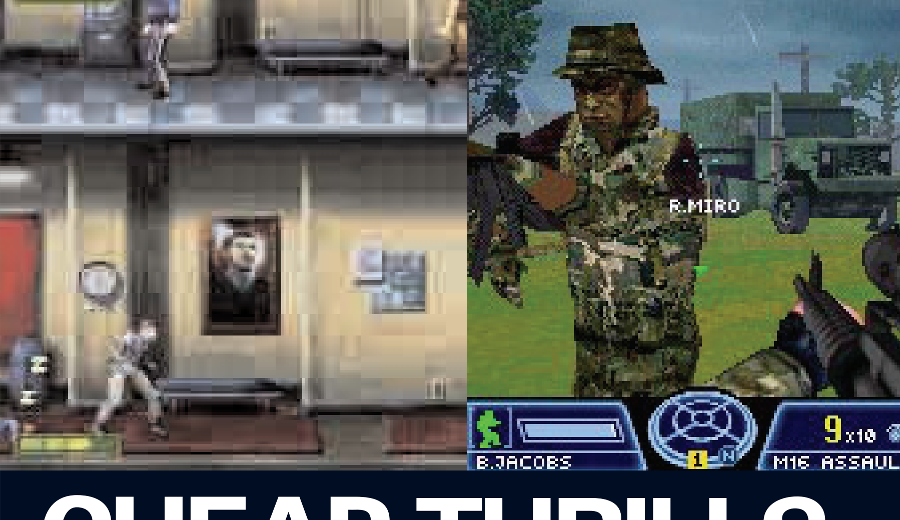


Sam can be yours for a bargain price. Splendid.



Are cheaper games enough to save the N-Gage?





CHEAP THRILLS

NOKIA LOWERS GAME PRICES TO BOOST SALES

Nokia has announced its latest move to boost sales of its flagging mobile phone-cum-gaming handheld, the N-Gage. Software for the N-Gage, and the restyled N-Gage QD, will now be available for as little as £15, with prices capped at £25. *X-Men Legends* and *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* will be the first new N-Gage titles with the adjusted pricing, while the existing games catalogue has already benefited from the lower prices.

"This new price makes it even easier to get your hands on an N-Gage QD to experience the thrill of mobile connected gaming," said Gerard Wiener, director and general manager of games at Nokia. "The N-Gage QD combines the best of phones and games which means it's always with you when you need a quick fix of gaming. Our latest N-Gage games provide great gaming experiences, whether it's a four-player Bluetooth sessions of *Snakes*, or providing back-up for your friend's *Pathway To Glory* platoon on the other side of the world through the N-Gage Arena."

But will these lower-price games really encourage people to buy N-Gages (or boost their existing software collection)? With the DS and Gizmondo out by the time you read this, and the PSP delayed but showing so much promise, you have to wonder whether Nokia's efforts will make much difference.



Samsung's new device will walk a different path to the N-Gage and other handhelds.

GAME ON FOR SAMSUNG

THE N-GAGE COULD BE IN FOR A LITTLE COMPETITION

As if people who want to play games on the move weren't spoilt for choice at the moment, there's going to be yet another way to play on the go. South Korean mobile phone company Samsung is planning to unveil a new games product that will be aimed towards the European gaming market.

Despite mostly concentrating on pushing its mobile TV products, it was revealed by Samsung vice president Ju-Ha Park that the firm would be starting work on a "very competitive games offering", but he also stated that it would not take the form of a standalone device like the N-Gage.

"There will be a games product and service this year, though not necessarily in a games-specific form," said Park. "Functionality such as 3D does not now require a dedicated handset and can instead be found in regular forms."

Exactly how this new games machine will manifest itself is still to be revealed, but we doubt either Nintendo or Sony are too worried. Nokia, on the other hand, is likely to be watching this new machine very closely.


eMag

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"A STORE THAT ACCEPTS AN OUT-OF-WARRANTY GAME, WHICH I SWAPS IT FOR A NICE NEW ONE – WELL, THAT'S



"Excuse me, it's about this crappy disc you sold me…"

It's no secret that the discs Ubisoft used for *Ghost Recon 2* on Xbox were rubbish. I know about 20 people who have it, and we all often get an error message that says, 'A problem has occurred. Please restart your Xbox.' This happens all the time. Usually when trying to accept an invitation, but also for no repeatable reason at all. This happens on all ages of console with all three types of drive. Pretty annoying, especially when you couple that with rushed code that has more holes in it than *Matrix Revolutions*. Well, mine got worse. I don't know what happened, maybe I breathed on it wrong, but it seems the easiest game to screw up in your collection is *GR2*.

First, it started taking longer to load the maps. Then the music started to freak out. I thought my machine was dying – after all, I'd been enjoying an early US release of *Mercenaries*, and its constant streaming during some hefty four-to-five-hour experimental sandbox sessions was, I reasoned, probably wearing the thing out. Over a couple of weeks, it gradually worsened. I knew something was terribly wrong when my uniform kept loading up as solid black, except for the camouflage ammo pouches and a zany marbled effect on my hat. It reminded me of when we'd play *GTA III* for eight hours and components would swell with heat until the buildings couldn't load before you reached them.

The sound was next to suffer. The aircraft that are supposed to whoosh overhead with stirring military might would instead start with the whoosh but corrupt harshly into a horrible ripping noise, tearing loudly across the speakers. Over the next couple of days, the gun sounds also corrupted, letting out hilarious almighty farts every time a team-mate fired their gun. If you play, as I do, in VLDD (Very Loud Dolby Digital) these guttural eruptions can be quite distracting. They would be accompanied by stutters and pauses in gameplay that apparently did not affect the enemy, which was handy for getting shot to bits.

Eventually, it just stopped loading altogether. Oh, it'd happily tease me for the entire excruciating FMV intro – suddenly unskippable, I might add – but then it'd fade to black and hang forever. I've heard from various gamers that boiling an Xbox disc – that is, literally steeping it in a saucepan of boiling water – can fix disc errors; something to do with heat flattening out a warped disc. That seemed, at best, risky.

I toddled off to ubi.com to see how much a replacement would cost. Ten dollars, it turns out, which is fine, but you have to contact the company personally for a special code before returning your game or it 'disappears' your family and fixes it so you can't even buy washing detergent on credit. A Ubisoft representative/ interrogator will determine whether it sounds like you deserve a replacement or not. I'm guessing usually not. Besides, the website is tight as a drum and if you want to talk to anyone to request one of these return codes, you have to register. I need another password in my life about as much as I



VERY PROBABLY BORKED MYSELF, AND ABOUT AS GOOD AS A RETAILER GETS"

need another avenue to receive junk mail. You also have to register, I noted, if you simply want to tell the webmaster how crappy it is that you have to register for everything. Obviously this is Ubi's way of mining information from everyone who asks for help, and I wasn't going to contribute to its little data racket.

Over three months since buying *Ghost Recon 2* on launch day, I didn't have a leg to stand on at the original store, a Gamestop; it states clearly that you have a maximum of 30 days to return faulty products. Mrs Shape suggested it was worth a go, regardless. She took it back, said, "This won't load any more", and was immediately given a brand new copy which works perfectly. I learned on NTSC-uk.com that Gamestop will soon be testing international markets, opening several branches in the UK. Although its used game prices are scandalous, it would be impossible not to recommend giving it a fair shake when it reaches British shores. Drawing from the same employment pool, Gamestop UK will likely appoint the same clueless zits that dissuade you from visiting the existing major chains already.

A store, however, that accepts an out-of-warranty game that, let's face it, I probably borked myself, over 90 days after sale, no questions asked, and swaps it for a nice new sealed one… well, that's about as good as a retailer gets.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Two Pence Pieces



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Jack Daniels Grilling Sauce



GOT ANY QUESTIONS FOR THE SHAPE? THEN JUST DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net YOU MIGHT GET A REPLY… OR POSSIBLY JUST THE FINGER.

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

SUPERBOWL PARTY



The Superbowl is an event so large it's lost all original meaning. Offers for Superbowl parties flood in; the one we went to this year had lots of cake, beer, Chinese dumplings and so on. One thing it had very little of, however, was football. I still don't know who won.

US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Gran Turismo 4	SCEA	PS2
2	NBA Street V3	EA Sports BIG	PS2
3	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	PS2
4	Mercenaries	LucasArts	PS2
5	The Punisher	THQ	PS2
6	Mercenaries	LucasArts	Xbox
7	NFL Street 2	EA Sports BIG	PS2
8	Project: Snowblind	Eidos	Xbox
9	Need For Speed Underground 2	Konami	PS2
10	Project: Snowblind	Eidos	PS2

(Updated 04/03/05)



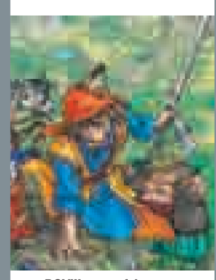
Gran Turismo 4

NBA Street V3

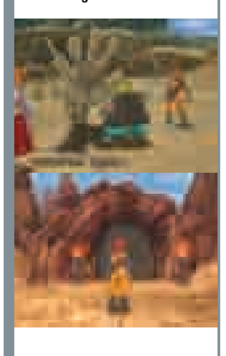
KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT TIM ROGERS

"GAMES ARE TO SOME 30-SOMETHING JAPANESE PEOPLE AS AMERICANS. BEDTIME READING – BOUGHT CASUALLY



DQVIII – one of the most beautiful games ever created.



There's a point in *Dragon Quest VIII* where everything slows down. Just as your party finally obtains concrete information on the whereabouts of the evil clown wizard Dolmageth and needs only one thing to proceed, the citizens of the grand city of Southern Beak begin their yearly carnival. If you're not too absorbed into the moment of the game and you stop to smell the marketplace, you'll see that new weapons, armour and accessories are available for each of your party, at exorbitant prices. Should you continue on the quest to charge the magic mirror with the sun's energy, you'll be flung far around the world, and if you come back to Southern Beak the carnival will be over. You'll never see those items for sale again.

It's my second time through *Dragon Quest VIII*. I played about 40 (purposely slow) hours to get to this point, and now I've been patrolling the vicinity of Southern Beak Castle for two to three hours a night for close to two months. I'm trying to save up enough money to buy all of the special items, like the Prayer Ring, which, when used in battle, recovers 10 to 20 magic points for the user. It costs 9,000 gold pieces; the average enemy drops around 30. It's a slow process. Still, I'm delighted to have found a game that compels me to play it as much as this one. For about two years now, every time I thought about videogames I came damn close to concluding that I'd never be able to enjoy a game as much as I enjoyed *Dragon Quest V* and *Final Fantasy VI*.

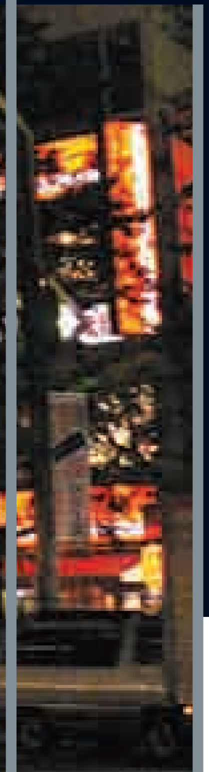
In a way, the Southern Beak Intermission is a fitting metaphor for the Japanese games market at the moment: the evil wizard's whereabouts have been confirmed; the magic item is in hand; the source of the energy that will charge that item has been pinpointed; nobody's in a rush to enter that dungeon and slay any dragons. It's a quiet, restful lull.

I've accumulated a stack of games from I know not where. I don't think I've ever had this many unplayed games in my possession at once. My childhood self would have me shot. What scares me most is how much I enjoy the ones I do play. *Radiata Stories*, *Tales Of Rebirth* – both excellent games that I enjoyed for a night each before going back to *Dragon Quest*. It's part of the Japanese gaming experience that you don't question things like brand loyalty. People will buy and play *Dragon Quest* games because of the way they feel while playing *Dragon Quest* games, even if *Tales Of Rebirth* feels kind of the same way.

"Games are to some 30-something Japanese people as books are to some older Americans," a friend who works for a company that is not Nintendo was telling me the other day, at a little party full of artists and graphic designers that I don't even know how I got invited to. "Bedtime reading – bought casually, played casually, enjoyed casually."

This friend had, just a few days before she said this, lined up at the Takeya store in Okachimachi to buy a yutanpo – a triple-





TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON THIRTY	BEING THE LIFE OF THE PARTY (WORKS BEST IF UNDER 30)
Japanese person: Ne, Nihon Budoukan itta koto aru?	Say, have you ever been to the Budokan?
You: Aa, ikkai shika itta koto naissu kedosa.	Well, I've only been there once.
JP: Aa, sounano? Dare no raibu wo mita?	Oh yeah? Whose [rock] show did you see?
You: O, miteta wake nai yo. Yatteta.	Oh, I wasn't seeing a show. I was playing.
JP: Ee, sugoi!!	Wow, amazing!!
You: Sonna ni sugokunaissu yo. Biitooruzu tteiu bando no oopeningu akkuto dake datta.	Oh, it's not so amazing – I was only opening for some band called The Beatles.

BOOKS ARE TO SOME OLDER AND ENJOYED CASUALLY"

thick plastic water bottle which the user fills with hot water, seals in a cloth bag, and sets at the foot of their futon to keep warm at night – at seven in the morning.

"It keeps my feet warm when I play *Dragon Quest VIII*. Things like this, like using a yutanpo while playing *Dragon Quest VIII*, they're things that Nintendo seems to have forgotten. Either that or they just never knew them in the first place." She elaborates: in February, more games are being released for Game Boy Advance than Nintendo DS. Nintendo's moving too fast, and too slow at the same time. She points me to a story that states used game stores are flooded with DS software, and yet the DS console outsold all DS games, combined, almost two to one. "Doesn't it seem kind of foolish?" she asks.

I agree that it does seem kind of foolish. In two hours, I'm at home, alone, sleepy, playing *Dragon Quest VIII*, with cold feet, still saving up for that Prayer Ring, and I've just about forgotten I know anything about videogames at all. It's a really nice feeling sometimes.

Kind regards



UNLEASH THE BEAST

I really like videogames. I really do. You're lucky to have asked me to write a column on one of those one or two days a month where I'll freely admit that.

I think I even like bad videogames. Take *Project Altered Beast*, for example. Holy hell, that's a bad game. There's nothing redeeming about it. It's grotesque and morbid, with walk-and-punch gameplay that could be emulated on a C64 and a monitor with the right brightness settings. Some internet fanboys had whispered months ago that it might be, at best, like an 'arcadey *Silent Hill*'. I tell you – the only thing *Silent Hill* about it is the depressing music while you walk around as a human, gathering energy for transformation. Then you transform into a werewolf. Time and again, still the same werewolf.

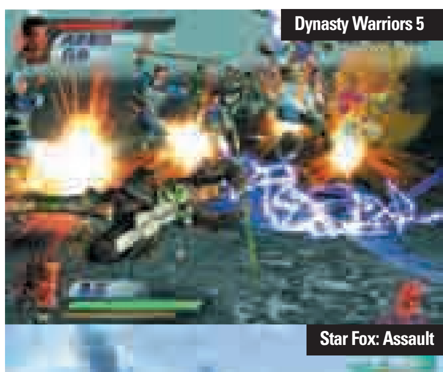
I was six hours in, playing out of sheer human terror alone, in a giant stone courtyard, when I turned into that werewolf, ready to mow down a swathe of giant rats. The Werewolf Music started playing. Like a merry-go-round from hell, punctuated every 30 seconds or so with a grainy, eight-bit-sounding digital wolf howl. I spit up Coca-Cola, even after hearing that howl for the seven-hundredth time. That was when I realised even a horrible game is worth something.

Actually, the whole point of this sidebar is to tell you that *Project Altered Beast*'s Japanese title is *Juouki*, which means 'A Chronicle of the Beast-King'. Snappy, huh? Almost makes you want to buy it.

JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Dynasty Warriors 5	Koei	PS2
2	Star Fox: Assault	Nintendo	GC
3	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	GBA
4	Another Code	Nintendo	DS
5	Pachinko Fist Of The North Star	Sega	PS2
6	Dragon Ball Z 3	Bandai	PS2
7	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	PS2
8	Sakura Wars 3	Sega	PS2
9	Namco Museum	Namco	PSP
10	Rumble Roses	Konami	PS2

(Week ending 27/02/05 © 2005 Media Create Co. Ltd. All Rights Reserved)



Dynasty Warriors 5



Star Fox: Assault

living the dream

What is it that's causing thousands of people to abandon the real world and live through a computer? Welcome to the realm of massively multiplayer online role-playing games…

You have entered Flob's Tavern. To the West are stairs leading to rooms for the weary traveller. To the East a small fire glows beside a bard writing his latest tall tale. Pugwash the Wizard is standing by the bar, waving at you. You are carrying: a club, a rusty key, the map to Fizzleburg. Pugwash says: "Alright, mate. Did you just see Rapido? I could hardly understand a word that French bloke said. Speaking of which, have you done your French homework?"

And so began my journey into the world of MMORPGs, or massively multiplayer online role-playing games to you, me and Pugwash the Wizard, AKA my mate Simon from school. The year was somewhere in the late Eighties, the game could have been any number of text-based adventures, and the excuse was that I was yet to discover girls. Kidnap Peter Molyneux (*Populous*), Will Wright (*The Sims*) and Warren Spector (*Deus Ex*), then lock them in a room and tell them they can't come out until they've made an offline game that can rival the depth, complexity and sheer compelling nature of an online offering. They'll be there for years. MMORPGS are the serious gamer's game. Perpetual worlds that you log into not load up. Any hour of any day there can be thousands of characters controlled by players across the globe, scurrying around vast gameworlds, doing whatever takes their fancy. As Swiss Toni would say, playing online games is like making love to a beautiful woman: you can either experience the rush of a quick knee-trembler with a frag-fest first-person shooter or enjoy the slower, thoughtful, tantric build-up of an online RPG. The latter is a more cerebral experience, there's more to think about than just killing whatever is in front of you.

Before acronyms took over the world, MMORPGs were commonly known as MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons, Dimensions or sometimes Domains). Back in 1978, lecturers at the University of Essex knew MUD as Multi-Undergrad Destroyer, an apt title considering the architects of the whole online gaming phenomenon were students in the Computer Science department. The home computing explosion of the mid-Eighties took the world of MUDs out of the realms of academia and into the bedrooms of Commodore kids, who could buy 2400-baud (that's 2.4Kb) modems for about the same price as a Millennium Falcon. With larger audiences, MUDs began to thrive, and the genre that had been almost entirely fantasy-based began to diversify. A space trading title called *Federation II* allowed players to buy spaceships, trade between a series of planets, engage in space combat, even buy factories that could produce goods to be sold on stock markets across the galaxy. It was still entirely text-based but managed to hook a large number of the Compunet users who would willingly shell out around £1.50 an hour to play the game.

Fast-forward to the present day and the world of MMORPGs may have changed on the surface but the underpinning framework remains largely the same. Subscription fees now thankfully run at roughly £10 a month for unlimited usage rather than crippling hourly



"My wife walked into the room and she was crying because she thought I didn't love her any more. That's when I knew I was playing too much"

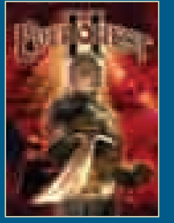
living the dream


The Matrix Online will let you indulge all your futuristic, gun-toting, high-kicking fantasies.


"My name's Dave, this is my castle, Dennis the dragon, the posse. We could use a guy like you…"

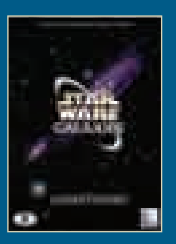
'Darling, come to bed' *Three very good reasons to stay up all night*

EverQuest II



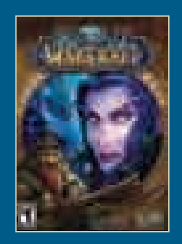
The recently released sequel to the global phenomenon that was *EverQuest*, this game takes place 500 years after the fantasy-based events of the original title. New features include the ability to own your own property as well as ride horses, command ships and experience all-new enhanced spells, quests and events.
www.everquest2.com

Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided



Star Wars goes massively multiplayer. Be a Rebel, an Imperial soldier or even stay neutral as the struggle between good and evil pans out. An expansion pack, *The Jump To Lightspeed*, lets you own and customise a ship before engaging in dogfights against people or AI-controlled ships.
www.starwarsgalaxies.com

World of Warcraft



Reputed to be the fastest-selling PC game in US sales history, *WoW* has already shifted 400,000 copies in Europe. The online version of developer Blizzard's classic fantasy RTS series, this title has won praise from critics and fans for its inventive gameplay and ground-breaking production values.
www.worldofwarcraft.com

rates. But the cavernous gameplay remains intact. The experience still revolves around a central character who starts as a feeble low-life and through building experience/skill points gradually becomes a more powerful figure. Power and rank tend to come through the levelling system, meaning that each time you earn enough experience points you can achieve the next level of character, earning new powers, privileges or abilities.

And then there's the economy. You'll need to earn money of some kind, which can normally be achieved through buying and selling items, becoming a craftsman or offering some service. The common denominator with all of those methods is the reliance on other players. MMORPGs are all about working with others, and even if you consider yourself to be the most hardened soloist you'll be missing the main event if you don't take part in the community. The text-based, fantasy-driven games of the Eighties have been pushed aside to showcase the visual splendour of today's richly detailed 3D worlds, where everything that once appeared as words on the screen can now be visually represented in fully rendered 3D glory. Pugwash the Wizard no longer has to type that he's waving at you, now you can actually see him without being told he's in the room.

Thanks to faster data rates and detailed 3D graphics, any genre of online game could be fully realised. Fancy some fiction with your science? Then *Anarchy Online*, a sort of *Blade Runner*-meets-*Dune* game, has been luring recruits like rats to the Piper's flute. If playing the hero is more your style, *City Of Heroes* should suit your needs – a title in which players can create their own unique superhero (there are millions of options based on special abilities, appearance and costume). And don't think that the big-money licence boys haven't got in on the act. *The Matrix Online* is finally out, while *Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided* has delivered the full *Star Wars* experience to the world of MMORPGs courtesy of two of the biggest names in the business: Sony Online Entertainment and Verant Interactive. The former acquired the latter in 2000, but Verant as a name is branded in the psyche of every hardened online gamer. Verant developed *EverQuest*, the game that broke down barriers and got the mass media talking about online gaming.

A traditional fantasy-style game, *EverQuest* took the online community by storm when it launched in 1999. It encouraged co-operative play rather than head-to-head combat, with players needing to team up while balancing the skills of each character in the group. The game has also become notorious for the amount of time it takes for characters to level up. To have a double-digit rank takes dozens of hours fighting AI-controlled monsters. But the more you play the better you get – and the better your experience becomes. As the game is a never-ending online experience, there's no pause button as such. You can't just save and log out in the middle of a co-operative objective.



“Even if you consider yourself a hardened soloist, you’ll be missing the main event if you don’t join in with the community”

World Of Warcraft could entice a new generation of online gamers with its accessibility.

You could have been camped with a team for over an hour, hunting monsters to gain valuable experience points, so leaving suddenly could seriously weaken your team and wreck everyone’s game. *EverQuest* and games of its ilk demand your time like an attention-seeking toddler.

Most people invest hours rather than cash and, naturally, some take it to extremes. Obsessive playing and subsequent addiction is on the rise – to the extent that support groups have been set up to help players kick the habit. One such group, Online Gamers Anonymous, encourages a 12-step approach almost identical to that of Alcoholics Anonymous. The organisation’s website (www.olganon.org) offers a screening process to gauge if gamers have potential problems. The message board is littered with tales of obsessive play, posted by people apparently ‘in recovery’.

A veteran games journalist working for a national UK newspaper told us about his own brush with addiction, on the condition of anonymity. “These games grab you, they suck you in and you become totally involved in something that doesn’t actually exist beyond your monitor. During the week I was playing for four or five hours each night. At the weekend, 12-hour sessions weren’t unheard of; sometimes more if I could get away with it. I was starting to become much more interested in what was happening in my online world rather than my real-life environment.

“You have to work hard to succeed in an online game, which means you really appreciate the riches, rewards and respect that you earn, [and] once you start placing a value on what you’ve achieved in-game, you’re hooked. I remember once being short of in-game cash so I devised a plan to rip off a load of high-ranking players by selling newly introduced items for millions of credits. The plan worked and it was such a buzz – I was beside myself with the adrenaline of pulling it off. But then my Guild found out and I was put on trial. My character was found guilty, resulting in my expulsion from the Guild. I sat there, having been up all night. I had a cold sweat, clammy palms – all the characteristics of a condemned man.

“Then my wife walked into the room and she was crying because she thought I didn’t love her any more. That’s when I knew I was playing too much.”

But to the vast majority of online gamers, MMORPGs are pure entertainment, albeit on a more sophisticated and demanding scale. *World Of Warcraft*, the new RPG based on the veteran fantasy franchise, is reported to be the fastest-selling PC game in the US to date. On day one, 240,000 games were sold, prompting 200,000 online account activations within the same 24-hour period. That’s about the same as the combined population of Dover and Hastings. Gaming addicts, damaged relationships, suicide, support centres, 200,000 people jumping online in one day… things have changed since Pugwash and I propped up the bar in Flob’s Tavern. It looks like this type of MUD has stuck.

Bad influence?

When online life takes over real life

The most severe case of true MMORPG addiction so far is the sad tale of 21-year-old American gamer, Shawn Woolley. Woolley, according to his mother, killed himself because his EverQuest character was rejected in an online romantic tryst. He had previously quit his job and played the game almost non-stop, eventually being evicted from his apartment.

“That damn game,” his mother said in a 2002 CBS News interview. “He shot himself because of the game.”



IS EXCELLENCE ENOUGH?



I was recently involved in a discussion where a friend criticised a game for being 'merely excellent'. I know he wasn't the type to be unnecessarily harsh but what he said struck a chord. The games we enjoy today eclipse everything that came before them, at least superficially. Where once there were only eight colours, now there are millions. Where there were electronic beeps there's now an orchestra.

If a game is found to be lacking in any area, the response from gamers is often swift and merciless. Occasionally this can end up being very amusing – I recall a typical 'my favourite is better than your favourite' debate covering topics as petty as which title had the more realistic bark on trees.

It's fair to say that games have contributed to people being desensitised to violence. I think that this has spread to the appreciation of excellence also. Why are fewer and fewer gamers celebrating the incredibly high standards set by today's videogames? Have we become snobs in our pursuit of videogame nirvana?

I believe that if a game does nothing more than entertain you it's still a success. Perhaps not a commercial success, but we'll leave that for others to argue over. This 'merely excellent' game entertained me – and I know it entertained my friend too. I have had, to date, 30 hours of entertainment from it. I think that's a good return for my £30. It's not the perfect game; I don't believe such a thing exists. As far as I'm concerned this game is a success and I applaud all those names in the credits for their time and effort.

Is excellence enough? It should be. Let's not overlook it next time we moan about something like loading times.

MR X HAS BEEN CHEWED UP AND SPAT OUT BY THE GAMES INDUSTRY. HE WISHES TO REMAIN ANONYMOUS.

FROM THE FRONT

THERE'S A NEW PLAYER IN THE SPORTS GAME MARKET, SO SHOULD EA BE RUNNING SCARED?



UBISOFT FIGHTS BACK

COULD EA HAVE UNDERESTIMATED UBISOFT?

Last month Ubisoft announced its intentions to move into the sports market by confirming that it has signed an exclusive agreement with golfer Vijay Singh.

In a move that obviously steps firmly on the toes of EA and its *Tiger Woods* series, Ubisoft will develop and publish a videogame series based on the number-one ranked golfer in the world, which will use tools that were bought from Microsoft.

It looks as if the further Microsoft moves away from the sports market, the better armed Ubisoft is going to be. The French developer/publisher – which is also responsible for the *Splinter Cell* and *Prince Of Persia* series – has already acquired the technology and source code behind many of Microsoft Game Studios' sports games, including *NHL Rivals, NFL Fever, NBA Inside Drive* and *MLB Inside Pitch*. This certainly gives some indication of Ubisoft's intention to challenge EA in the sports market, with plans to develop games for all platforms, concentrating initially on consoles including Xbox and next-gen formats.

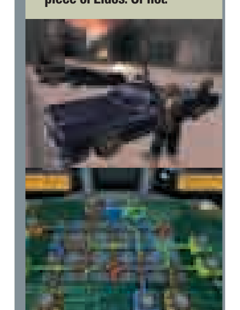
"There is still room for innovation in the sports genre and Ubisoft has some great ideas that we're looking forward to implementing," said Yves Guillemot, president and chief executive officer of Ubisoft. "We hope to not only offer sports fans games that have a unique flair and character, but also something that will take advantage of the fabulous capacities of current and next-generation consoles."

After EA's purchase of a batch of Ubisoft's shares, this competition could well be Ubisoft's attempt at showing the industry giant that it can manage perfectly well on its

Ubisoft is taking the fight to EA in the sports game market.



It seems everyone wants a piece of Eidos. Or not.



HOUSE OF LARA – FOR SALE OR NOT?

LATEST BUYOUT RUMOURS PROVE TO BE FALSE

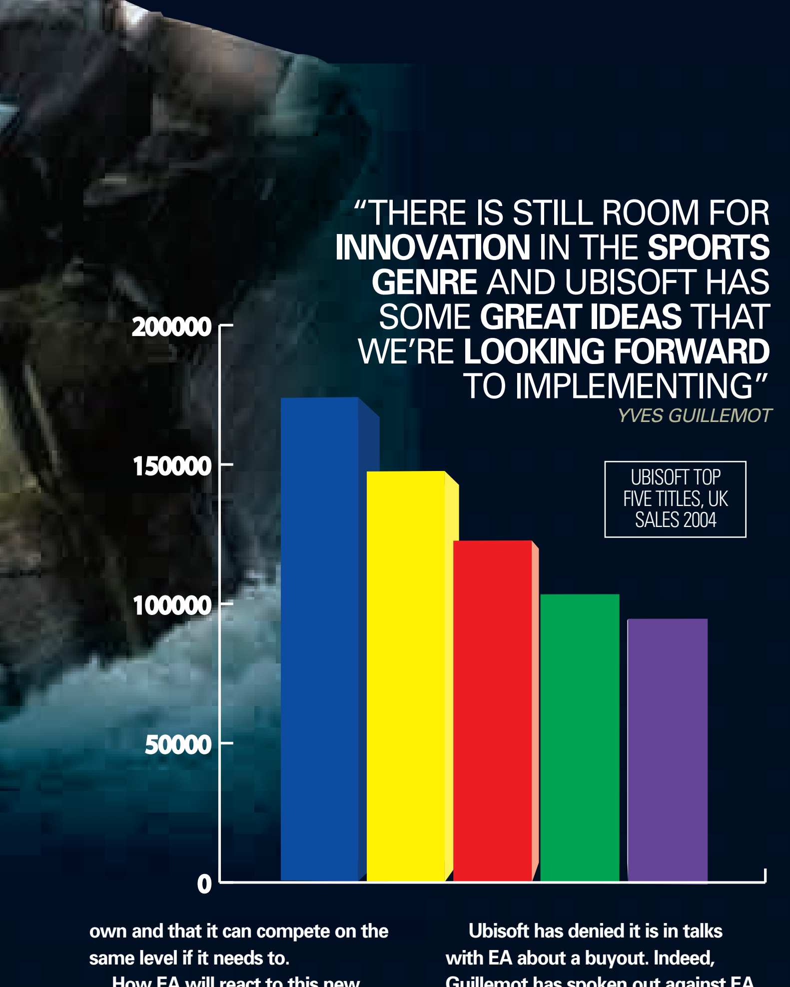
Another month has passed and we are greeted once again with fresh rumours of an Eidos buyout. Only this time it looks as if there is far less truth behind the story than usual.

Struggling publisher Eidos has been involved in a string of potential buyouts over the last few months and the latest company that was reported to be interested was Rupert Murdoch's News International. Murdoch has recently expressed his interest in acquiring games studios, even claiming to have big-hitters such as EA in his sights.

Interestingly, as soon as these reports were made public the rumours were quelled by News International representatives who have now confirmed that the company is not at all interested in purchasing Eidos, which suggests to us that the rumours may have been started by a shareholder looking to up the price before a sale.

Exactly what the future holds for Eidos remains a mystery, though it will be hoping for a hit with *Hitman: Blood Money*. The way things are going, we're sure we'll be able to report on yet another possible buyer next month.

> "THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR **INNOVATION** IN THE **SPORTS GENRE** AND UBISOFT HAS SOME **GREAT IDEAS** THAT WE'RE **LOOKING FORWARD** TO IMPLEMENTING"
>
> *YVES GUILLEMOT*



- **Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within (PS2)** 174,640
- **Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (Xbox)** 147,791
- **Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow (PS2)** 122,700
- **Far Cry (PC)** 103,368
- **Splinter Cell (PS2)** 94,587

own and that it can compete on the same level if it needs to.

How EA will react to this new threat to its sports titles remains to be seen, but we can be sure that there's a very interesting high-street battle ahead.

Ubisoft has denied it is in talks with EA about a buyout. Indeed, Guillemot has spoken out against EA, claiming that his company has "a plan" (which he won't reveal) that will help it resist EA's advances, predatory or otherwise.

POOR SALES CAUSE DOWNFALL OF RPG DEVELOPER

TROIKA CLOSES ITS DOORS

Developer Troika Games has been forced to shut down after weeks of speculation regarding the future of the studio. Confirmation of the closure came last month when co-CEO Leonard Boyarsky posted a message on fansite No Mutants Allowed.

"As many of you may have already heard, Troika has laid off all of its employees and is closing its doors due to our inability to secure funding for future projects," Boyarsky wrote. "We want to thank all of our fans for their support these past seven years – it has really meant a lot to us that there were people out there who enjoyed our games enough to create fan-site and follow the progress of our company."

Troika was established in 1998 by the design team responsible for classic RPG *Fallout* for Interplay. The company went on to provide three further titles in six years, the most successful of which was *Vampire: The Masquerade*, which struggled hugely due to sharing a launch date with Valve's *Half-Life 2*.

Instances such as this, together with the fact that its games appealed to such niche markets, that are likely to have led to Troika's poor performance and eventual closure.

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	**Mercenaries**	Activision	Multi
2	**Sonic Mega Collection Plus**	Sega	Multi
3	**SpongeBob Squarepants Movie**	THQ	Multi
4	**Knights Of The Old Republic II**	Activision	Xbox
5	**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas**	Rockstar	PS2
6	**Need For Speed Underground 2**	EA Games	Multi
7	**Ace Combat: Squadron Leader**	SCEE	PS2
8	**UEFA Champions League 04/05**	EA Sports	Multi
9	**World Of Warcraft**	Vivendi	PC
10	**Pro Evolution Soccer 4**	Konami	Multi

At last, *Need For Speed*'s reign is over – although it's only sunk a little, so we're not rid of it just yet. *Mercenaries* at the top is no real surprise (ridiculous explosions tend to do it for the general public) but at least the goodness of *World Of Warcraft* is doing well.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of Elspa (UK) Ltd. UK Entertainment Software Sales Charts (Full Price, All Formats) (w/e 26 February 2005)



Mercenaries

Sonic Mega Collection Plus

SpongeBob Squarepants

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES

RELEASE LISTS



World Of Warcraft PC You didn't want to go outside ever again, did you? Oh…

Fahrenheit Multi Atari makes good with Vivendi's fumbled ball.

Devil May Cry 3 PS2 Better have another controller ready just in case.

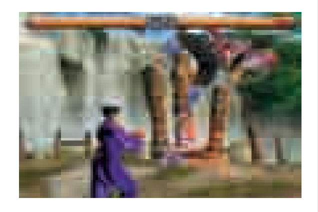


games™ MOST PLAYED

TEKKEN 5

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sony

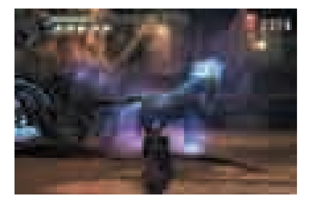
Okay, so it isn't quite up to the quality of *Virtua Fighter 4 Evo* or *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike* but there's a certain sense of nostalgia that keeps us coming back to *Tekken 5*. Perhaps it's the fact that we like fighting as bears and pandas. There's nothing quite so majestic as a big-pawed, furry brawl.



DEVIL MAY CRY 3

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom

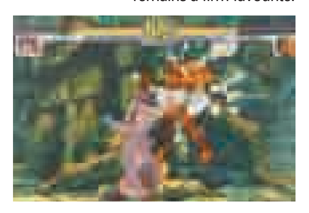
This one makes it into our most-played list through necessity and perseverance rather than choice – as much as we love it, much of our time this month was spent retrying those troublesome bosses and later levels. Still, it was worth it in the end.



STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Capcom

Yes, still. Every single lunchtime, crowds gather as the office's finest face off in what are rapidly becoming awesome matches. Rewarding skill, practice and commitment like virtually no other game can, *3rd Strike* remains a firm favourite.



PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
25 March	Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	Wanted
25 March	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
25 March	EyeToy: Antigrav	Sony	
25 March	The Bard's Tale	Ubisoft	
25 March	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
25 March	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
25 March	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	EA	Wanted
25 March	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
APRIL '05			
1 April	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
1 April	La Pucelle	Koei	
1 April	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
1 April	Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	
1 April	Spy vs Spy	Take 2	
1 April	MX vs ATV Unleashed	THQ	
8 April	Red Ninja: End Of Honor	Vivendi	
15 April	Death By Degrees	Sony	
15 April	Kao The Kangaroo Round 2	JoWood	
15 April	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
15 April	World Championship Snooker 2005	Sega	
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
22 April	Ghost In The Shell: Stand Alone Complex	Atari	
29 April	Kessen III	Koei	Wanted
29 April	Haunting Ground	Capcom	
MAY '05			
20 May	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
27 May	Monster Hunter	Capcom	Wanted
JUNE '05			
3 June	SOCOM 3	Sony	
TBC	God Of War	Sony	Wanted
Q2 '05			
TBC	Everybody's Golf 4	Sony	
TBC	Guilty Gear Isuka	Sega	
TBC	Moto GP 4	Sony	
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	
TBC	Fear And Respect	Midway	
TBC	Cold Winter	Vivendi	
TBC	Kingdom Hearts 2	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Okami	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	Resident Evil Outbreak: File 2	Capcom	
TBC	The Nightmare Before Christmas	Capcom	
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	Killer7	Capcom	Wanted
TBC	LA Rush	Midway	
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	NARC	Midway	



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
25 March	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
25 March	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	EA	Wanted
APRIL '05			
1 April	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Ubisoft	
1 April	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
1 April	Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	Wanted
15 April	Kao The Kangaroo Round 2	JoWood	
TBC	Baten Kaitos	Nintendo	
MAY '05			
TBC	Star Fox: Assault	Nintendo	
JUNE'05			
24 June	Killer7	Capcom	Wanted
Q2 '05			
TBC	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Nintendo	
TBC	Nintendo Puzzle Collection	Nintendo	
TBC	The Movies	Activision	
TBC	Odama	Nintendo	



XBOX

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
25 March	TimeSplitters: Future Perfect	EA	Wanted
25 March	The Bard's Tale	Ubisoft	
25 March	Rainbow Six 4: Lockdown	Ubisoft	
25 March	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
25 March	Stolen	Hip Interactive	
APRIL '05			
1 April	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
1 April	Spy vs Spy	Take 2	
1 April	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take 2	
1 April	MX vs ATV Unleashed	THQ	
8 April	Doom 3	Activision	Wanted
8 April	Red Ninja: End Of Honor	Vivendi	
15 April	Kao The Kangaroo Round 2	JoWood	
15 April	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Rockstar	
15 April	SpikeOut Battle Street	Sega	
15 April	Unreal Championship 2	Midway	
15 April	World Championship Snooker 2005	Sega	
15 April	WWE WrestleMania 21	THQ	
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
29 April	Forza Motorsport	Microsoft	
29 April	Conker: Live And Reloaded	Microsoft	Wanted
MAY '05			
6 May	Pariah	Hip Interactive	Wanted

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Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition Multi Pimp and race your ride, bwoy.

Star Fox: Assault Cube What have they done to you, Fox? Where is your lovely fur?

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks Multi Honestly – it's like *Blade 2* never happened…

Tekken 5 PS2 The King Of Mashing Buttons Tournament returns.

Month	Title	Publisher	
20 May	Super Monkey Ball Deluxe	Sega	
JUNE'05			
10 June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Wanted
Q2 '05			
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	Destroy All Humans!	THQ	Wanted
TBC	NARC	Midway	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	Far Cry Instincts	Ubisoft	
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Half-Life 2	Vivendi	
TBC	Area 51	Midway	
TBC	Kameo: Elements Of Power	Microsoft	
TBC	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Wanted
TBC	Jade Empire	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	Midway	



PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
25 March	The Bard's Tale	Ubisoft	
25 March	Earth 2160	Deep Silver	
25 March	Battlefield 2	EA	
APRIL '05			
1 April	Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory	Ubisoft	Wanted
1 April	Sacred Underworld	Koch Media	
1 April	Stronghold 2	Take 2	
1 April	SWAT 4	Vivendi	
1 April	Close Combat: First To Fight	Take 2	
8 April	The Punisher	THQ	
8 April	Trackmania Sunrise	Digital Jesters	Wanted
15 April	World Championship Snooker 2005	Sega	
22 April	Dungeon Lords	DreamCatcher	
22 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
29 April	X2: The Return	Koch Media	
MAY '05			
6 May	Pariah	Hip Interactive	Wanted
20 May	Boiling Point: Road To Hell	Atari	Wanted
20 May	Singles: Triple Trouble	Kock Media	
JUNE'05			
10 June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar	Wanted
TBC	Bet On Soldier	Digital Jesters	
Q2 '05			
TBC	CT Special Forces: Fire For Effect	Hip Interactive	
TBC	Cossacks 2: Napoleonic Wars	CDV	
TBC	Duke Nukem Forever	Vivendi	
TBC	The Matrix Online	Warner Bros	
TBC	Settlers: Heritage Of Kings	Ubisoft	

Month	Title	Publisher	
TBC	Sniper Elite	MC2	Wanted
TBC	UFO: Aftershock	Cenega	
TBC	Black & White 2	EA	
TBC	Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Wanted
TBC	S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow Of Chernobyl	THQ	Wanted

GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MARCH '05			
25 March	Tak 2: The Staff Of Dreams	THQ	
APRIL '05			
1 April	Lego Star Wars	Eidos	
MAY '05			
TBC	Mario Party Advance	Nintendo	
JUNE'05			
10 June	Mega Man Battle Network 5	Capcom	
Q2 '05			
TBC	Boktai 2: Solar Boy Django	Konami	
TBC	Pokémon Emerald	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	F-Zero Climax	Nintendo	
TBC	Wario Ware: Twisted!	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Elf: The Movie	TBC	
TBC	Batman Begins	EA	

PLAYSTATION PORTABLE

Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
TBC	PlayStation Portable Hardware	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Ridge Racers	Namco	Wanted
TBC	DarkStalkers Chronicles	Capcom	
TBC	Need For Speed Underground Rivals	EA	
TBC	Dynasty Warriors	Koei	
TBC	Tiger Woods 2005	EA	
TBC	NBA Street Showdown	EA	
TBC	WipEout Pure	Sony	Wanted
TBC	FIFA 2005	EA	
TBC	Everybody's Golf	Sony	Wanted
TBC	Metal Gear Ac!d	Konami	
TBC	Ape Academy	Sony	
TBC	Lumines	TBC	Wanted
TBC	Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	
Q2 '05			
TBC	NFL Street 2	EA	
TBC	Gran Turismo 4 Mobile	Sony	Wanted

NINTENDO DS

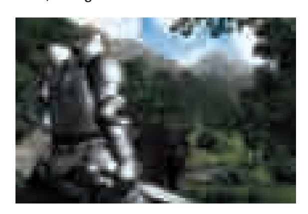
Month	Title	Publisher	
MAY '05			
TBC	Mr Driller: Drill Spirits	TBC	Wanted
Q2 '05			
TBC	Yoshi: Touch And Go	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pac Pix	TBC	
TBC	Castlevania DS [working title]	Konami	Wanted
TBC	Tiger Woods 2005	EA	

PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. Which is completely beyond our control, so don't go giving us evils.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION

Format: Multi
Publisher: Take 2
After *Morrowind* dragged the first-person RPG into this generation (and amassed quite a following in the process), hopes are high for Bethesda's next project. Judging by the way things are going, it could be a while before we get our hands on it, though. Shame.



FEAR AND RESPECT

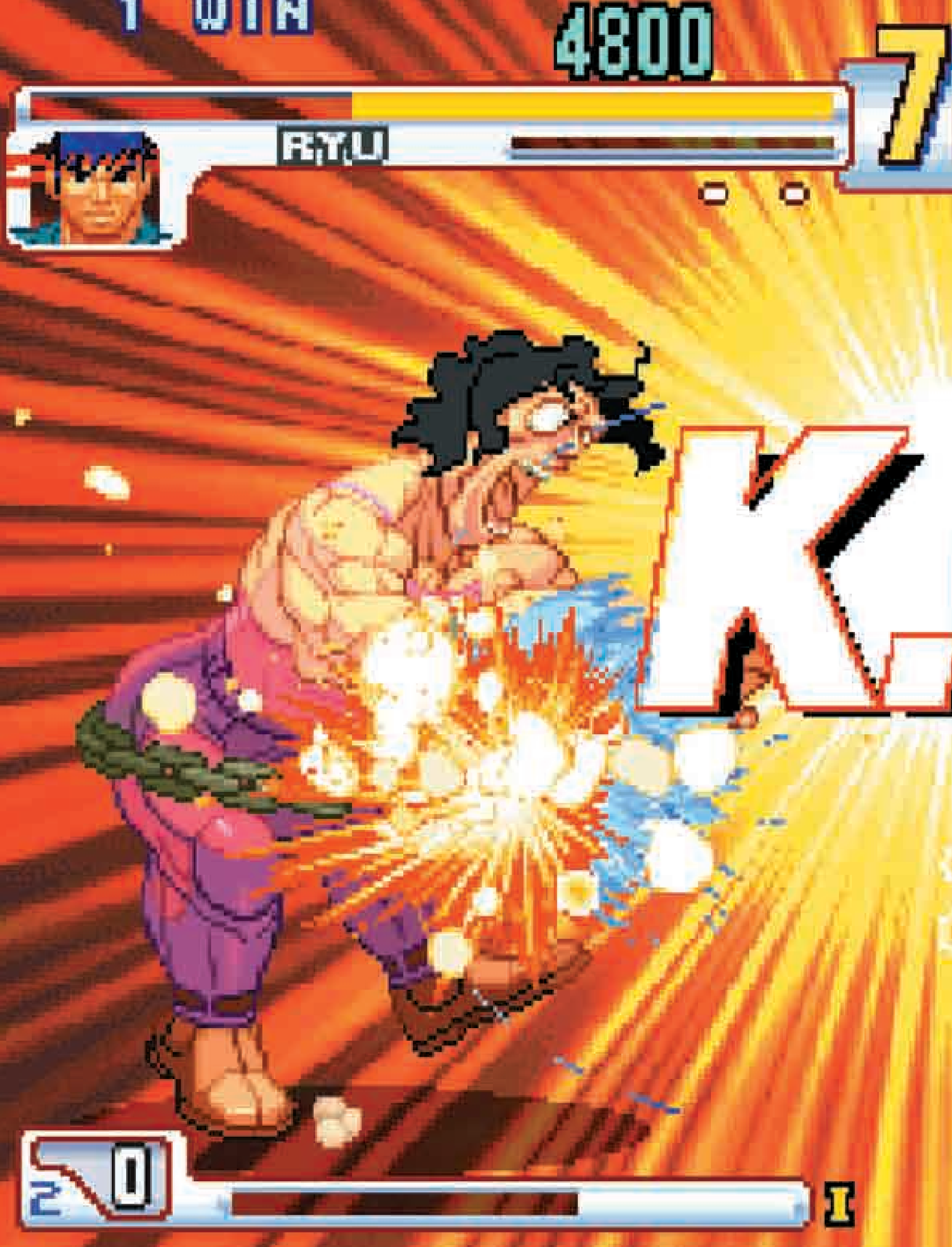
Format: Multi
Publisher: Midway
With Snoop Dogg and director John Singleton on board, it looks as though Midway is intent on having a serious crack at what *San Andreas* did in a slightly more jovial manner. Details are scant at the moment but it's likely to be one of the American firm's key titles at E3 this year.

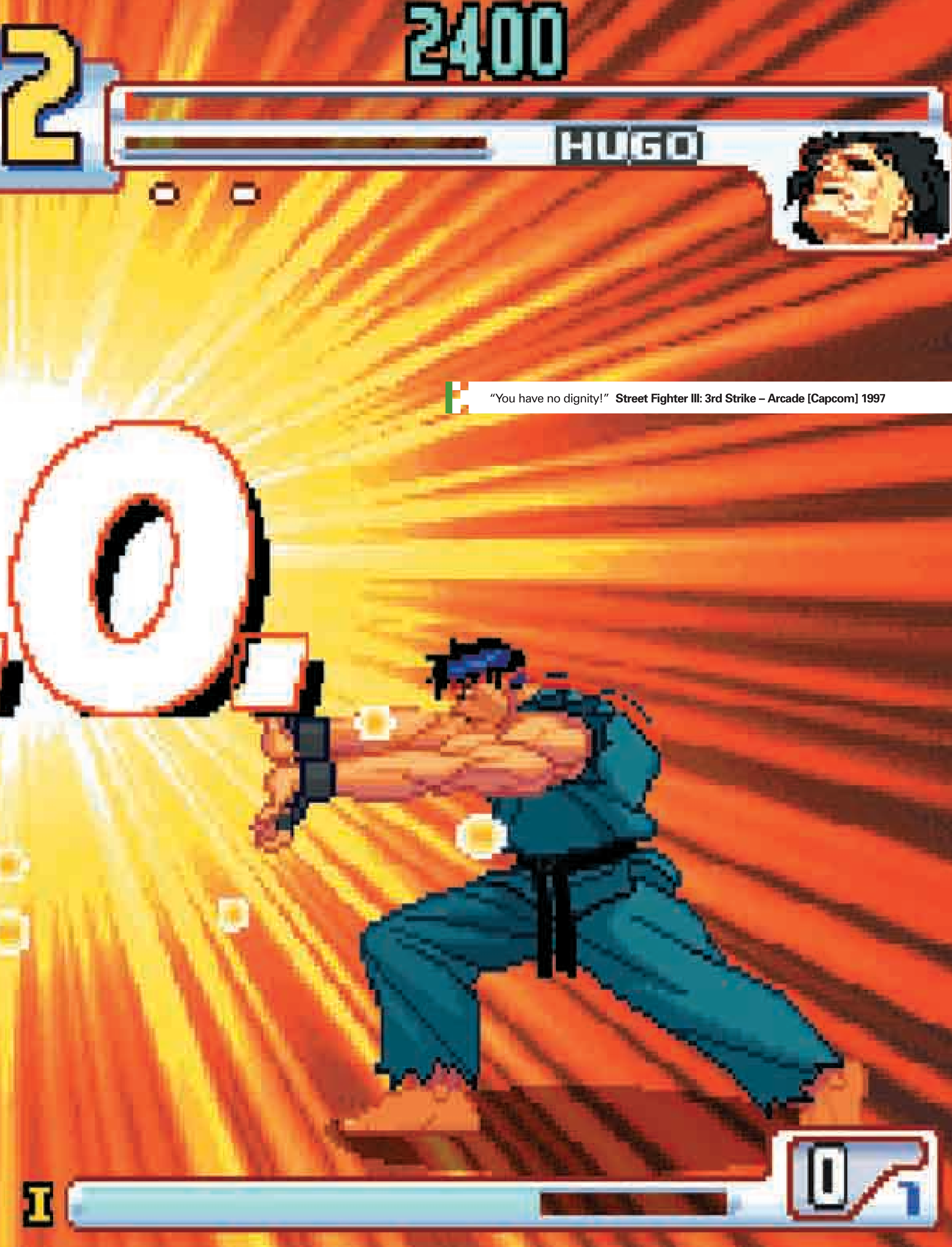


PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

Format:TBC
Publisher: Sega
It's been some two years since we last trudged through *Phantasy Star Online* so, naturally, news that that the next *Phantasy Star* is soon to be properly unveiled has filled us with glee. New RPG adventure? Online co-operation? MMORPG? Watch this space…




1 WIN
4800
RYU
K.
0



"You have no dignity!" **Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike – Arcade [Capcom] 1997**

IN NYC, A NEW BREED OF GAME EMERGES FROM THE ICE

FAHRENHEIT

PS2 We'd like to believe we're not alone in the gaming fraternity when we claim to enjoy settling down of an evening with a good book and a glass of hard liquor. After all, while games are able to provide us with a great number of ways to fill our free time, there are some things that gaming, as a form, is unable to achieve in the same way as the self-governing flow of good prose. Likewise, games have often attempted to ape the form and function of modern film without ever managing to quite meld the two forms together into a cogent whole. However, if Quantic Dream can make good on the promise it shows with *Fahrenheit*, we may be forced to reconsider our opinion on games as a mixed-media form.

Fahrenheit is a genuine attempt to stretch the reach of gaming beyond its generic boundaries into something far more specialised and more widely enjoyable for a non-gaming, novel- and movie-loving market. Nonetheless, this is no attempt to drag the interactive movie genre from the crypt of *Phantasmagoria* and resurrect it, as *Fahrenheit*'s writer and director, David Cage, is quick to assert.

"I don't like to call *Fahrenheit* an interactive movie," he says. "I feel much closer to the very first, text-based adventure games of 20 years ago for this unique feeling they gave of playing with the story. I define *Fahrenheit* as the next generation of adventure games. It is in real-time 3D, it is fast-paced, relies on stress, includes fast action sequences, it is visually stunning and, most of all, it is really addictive. It may sound very arrogant, but *Fahrenheit* tries to create its own narrative language."

Indeed, by taking the form of tried-and-tested adventure fodder such as *Broken Sword*, and combining it with a structured narrative viewed from multiple perspectives and a keen eye for the cinematic, *Fahrenheit* is a fast-paced maelstrom, intent on forcing players to rethink how they look at games in general. "*Fahrenheit* tries to explore a different direction," continues Cage. "It gets rid of recurrent mechanics and tries to put the story at the centre of the experience. You continue to play because you want to know what will happen next, because you care for the characters; exactly the same process as in a movie. I hope that it will draw a wider audience to games. It would be a positive signal for this industry to see that it is possible to break the more traditional game rules."

Not that Quantic Dream is unfamiliar with treading new ground; its previous game, the surreal *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*, was a bold attempt to define new boundaries and was met with the sort of polar reaction commonly levied at original game ideas. "The main lesson from *Nomad Soul*," claims Cage, "was that it is difficult to get some people on board when the world is totally different from the one they know. With *Fahrenheit* I wanted to create a ▷

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Quantic Dream
RELEASE: Summer '05
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Taking the publishing reins from Vivendi, Atari looks to bank on originality and ambition with one of the most intriguing titles we've seen for some time.

HISTORY

■ Quantic Dream has only made one game before, but it's hoping to innovate in the tricky game-as-movie genre.

"EACH AND EVERY ACTION UNDERTAKEN BY THE PLAYER WILL HAVE A KNOCK-ON EFFECT THAT ALTERS FUTURE EVENTS"



FAHRENHEIT

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

"THIS INDUSTRY OFTEN CONSIDERS THAT GAMERS ARE JUST A BUNCH OF GEEK TEENAGERS WHO WANT TO DRIVE CARS AND KILL ZOMBIES"

DAVID CAGE, QUANTIC DREAM

contemporary story, taking place in our world. Everybody knows the rules; it is much easier to identify yourself with the characters. I also saw with *Nomad Soul* the difficulty of telling a consistent story over an interactive experience, and I still think today that very few games manage to do it. With *Fahrenheit*, I decided to put the story at the centre of the experience rather than just being an alibi for the action sequences."

The story begins in the rest room of a Brooklyn café in 2009, where Lucas Kane has just stabbed a stranger to death. Unable to control his actions, he has, like the player, been thrown into a situation where panicked snap judgements are likely to overtake rational thought. Should Lucas flee, or attempt to hide the evidence of his crime? In any other game, hidden triggers would guide the player to the correct outcome, probably disabling 'wrong' choices in favour of a pre-scripted solution. But in *Fahrenheit*, the approach is different.

A *24*-style picture-in-picture display shows a police officer walking through the café to the toilets. Before the game has even begun, Lucas must work against the clock, choosing how much to cover his tracks in the time provided before getting out of the diner (either paying his bill or running for the exit). By the time the cop arrives at the scene – and depending on the skill of the gamer – Lucas may have given himself enough time to escape capture, but every action undertaken by the player will have an effect on future events. "I have used a specific writing technique that I call 'bending stories'," says Cage. "I consider my story as a rubber band. It has a start, middle and an end; it is the core story I want to tell. The player can stretch the rubber band, make it longer or shorter, or deform it. My core story is always there whatever happens."

To this end, and highlighting the ambitious nature of *Fahrenheit*'s narrative style, the next scene does not feature Lucas at all, but involves the two detectives investigating the murder. The game then plays out from each of these three perspectives, as the player takes control of the pursuers and the pursued. "This is what made Hitchcock movies so unique," says Cage. "The story follows different characters but only the audience knows what happens to all. In *Fahrenheit*, the experience plays with multiple characters in a very similar way. Each character tells a piece of the main story." It's an effect heightened by the shifting camera, which often shows the perspectives of two characters at once to create suspense in a Hitchcockian yet ultra-modern 'criss-cross' manner. "In most games, camera directing is just present in cut-scenes, but in interactive scenes it does not express anything. I wanted the camera to give a real sense of directing in-game play, contribute to the immersion and the atmosphere, and be a very easy device for the player who wants to use them."

The effort the developer is investing in creating technology to furnish its wild designs cannot be underestimated, especially since the production of *Fahrenheit* is reliant on Quantic Dream's proprietary ICE engine. "Our policy at

ACTION MOVIE

Rather than confining itself to the methodical realms of the mouse-stroking adventurer, *Fahrenheit* is comfortable varying its tempo to accommodate more involved action sequences, usually 'controlled' by means of a rhythm-action tap-fest. Cage explains: "you can play basketball, have a car chase, be hanging under a helicopter, do ice skating or fight 'à la *The Matrix*' with supernatural powers." The developer is hopeful that adventure gamers will be quick to accept these sections for their dynamic, cinematic presentation and the level of immersion they bring to otherwise passive story elements. "The player will never know what to expect next: each sequence contributes to tell the story and build his relationship with the characters. Videogames in general heavily rely on sequenced mechanics wrapped in a vague story. I call this kind of narrative 'disruptive narrative'. It is very close to storytelling methods in porn movies." Damn – if we taught classes in generic game design, we'd definitely get David Cage to lecture.

"THE EFFORT THE DEVELOPER IS INVESTING IN CREATING TECHNOLOGY TO FURNISH ITS WILD DESIGNS CAN'T BE UNDERESTIMATED"

FAHRENHEIT
PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

DEVELOPER PROFILE
■ Quantic Dream's previous effort, the David Bowie-fronted *Omikron: The Nomad Soul*, was met with equal measures of derision and exaltation. Now, after designing its own middleware tools, the developer hopes to create a new genre with *Fahrenheit*.

HISTORY
■ **OMIKRON: THE NOMAD SOUL 2001 [PC]**

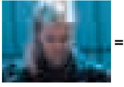
"OUR POLICY AT QUANTIC DREAM IS THAT DESIGN DRIVES TECHNOLOGY. IT QUICKLY BECAME OBVIOUS THAT THE GAME WOULD REQUIRE A VERY DIFFERENT APPROACH"

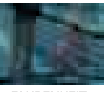
DAVID CAGE, QUANTIC DREAM

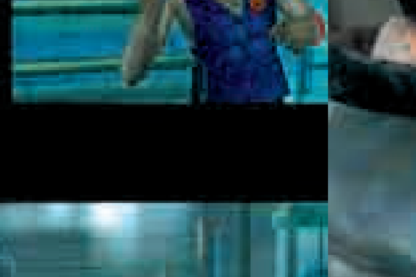
VIDEOGAMES MATHS
IT'S GETTING HOT IN HERE


BOOKS ÷

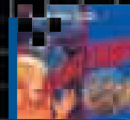

BROKEN SWORD x


24 =


FAHRENHEIT



■ You'll get to view the story from multiple angles, including those of a killer and the people pursuing him.

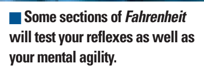


GENRE PROFILE

■ Interactive movies began with barely controlled titles such as *Night Trap* offering low-quality FMV in a quarter-screen box. The likes of *Gabriel Knight 2* and *The Black Dahlia* were more involving, but the genre has died out as graphics have become better.

HISTORY

- THE BLACK DAHLIA 1998 [PC]
- WING COMMANDER 3 1994 [PC]
- NIGHT TRAP 1992 [PC]



■ Some sections of *Fahrenheit* will test your reflexes as well as your mental agility.



■ Human movement in the game looks astonishing thanks to the hard work of Quantic's MoCap studio.

UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

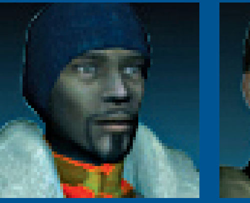
THE VARIED PERSPECTIVES IN FAHRENHEIT ENABLE NEW WAYS TO EXAMINE THE GAME'S NARRATIVE STRUCTURE. BUT WHO'S WHO?

LUCAS KANE

Something about Lucas' childhood holds deep-seated psychological problems for him, which will become apparent as the game progresses. Could these events have something to do with the horrific visions he's been having? Or could it be something to do with his parents' mysterious fatal car crash?

CARLA VALENTI

A strong personality and consummate professional, Carla is one of the detectives on Lucas' trail. Analytical and shrewd, Carla's role in the story is to forward the plot in terms of exposition, and unshroud the mysteries surrounding Lucas' more supernatural activities.



TYLER MILES

Having lost his brother to gang violence, Tyler decided to invest his time serving the community. But he's no stereotypical 'urban' character. As well as serving as a comic character, Tyler offers a second perspective on detective scenes, and it's often possible to switch between him and Carla.



MARCUS KANE

While not a playable character, Lucas' estranged big brother is the moral conscience of *Fahrenheit*. A devout priest, he's torn between loyalties when Lucas confesses his uncontrollable sins. Will he stand by his sibling, or turn stool pigeon under the burden of guilt?

▷ Quantic Dream is that design drives technology," says Cage. "It quickly became obvious that the game would require a very different approach, with very complex scripting needs, a high-end camera system, high expectations regarding animations and facial expressions to create a truly immersive experience. The multi-path scenario also appeared to be incredibly 'data consuming', which created the necessity to have a very effective production pipeline."

That an independent developer would undertake such a risky venture is unusual in the current industry climate, but Cage's plans for the technology stretch long past the completion of this particular project. "Our investment in ICE goes beyond *Fahrenheit*. It is a complete toolbox including a cross-platform engine, a powerful scripting tool and graphic tools… Today, the risk is behind us. We see it as an incredible competitive advantage. We are technologically independent; we are prepared for the next-generation cycle and we have developed some unique tools that enable us to create highly differentiated games."

ICE's strengths are apparent throughout early code of *Fahrenheit*, not only in the multi-path scripting and use of the camera, but also in the graphical quality, with every in-game character gracefully motion-captured; the simple, realistic beauty of two children playing in a frozen park is spellbinding. "I think that *Fahrenheit* will be the very first game to offer such a wide variety of animations at this level of quality," claims Cage. "The volume of animations produced is huge – about 12 hours of linear real-time animations are implemented in the game. Having standard animations would have taken us ten years or 200 animators."

So, with its ambitious technology in the bag, the biggest risk now for *Fahrenheit* is whether it will be welcomed by a console market that has been let down by ill-fitting PC titles in the past. Cage is confident that it will find an audience on PS2 and Xbox as well as its spiritual home on PC. "Will console gamers 'get' it? Why wouldn't they?" he says. "This industry often considers too much that gamers are just a bunch of retarded geek teenagers who only want to drive cars and kill zombies. I am sure there are console owners who are looking for more evolved content."

He also hopes *Fahrenheit* will restore the faith of disenchanted 'adventure' gamers. "Hardcore adventure gamers will probably be the first to adopt *Fahrenheit*. I hope they will see how much it renews



FAHRENHEIT

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT

DEGREES OF CONTROL

With so much complex innovation under *Fahrenheit*'s belt, you'd be forgiven for expecting the more methodical aspects of the game to play out much like any other point-and-click title, but not so. *Fahrenheit* uses the right stick or mouse to govern actions, with on-screen tasks mimicked by the movement of the analogue. "The action method in *Fahrenheit* is called MPAR (Motion Physical Action Reaction)," says Cage. "The idea was to create physical immersion for the player, even in the simplest actions, by creating a physical link between the movement he has to perform with the right stick and the movement of his character on-screen." So, for example, in order to mop up a pool of blood, the player must sweep the controller in the same manner as Lucas himself uses the broom, while later tasks involve such actions as carefully performing compressions on the chest of a half-drowned child.

their favourite genre. The tone and the style of *Fahrenheit* will hopefully convince them that interactivity can become a very powerful creative media, accessible to all." But whether *Fahrenheit* succeeds or not, it deserves an opportunity and, thankfully, Atari has just picked up the publishing rights from VU Games, saving a highly original game from the sort of incognito death that can drag an entire studio down.

"The change of publisher actually had a very positive impact on our game," says Cage, relieved his labour of love has found a secure stable. "We felt we needed the full support, at all stages, of our publisher. Most publishers are keener to create 'me-too' products these days, rather than taking risks and being ambitious, but if they don't take risks any more, players will get tired at some point of playing the same games. As much as I respect *Grand Theft Auto*, the market will die if all our industry has to offer is 30 *GTA* clones every year."

We couldn't agree more; luckily, *Fahrenheit* couldn't be further from the current gang-shaped cookie-cutter even if it added an urban soundtrack and got 50 Cent to star in it. What's that, Vivendi? It's the end of the world, you say?

"MOST PUBLISHERS ARE KEENER TO CREATE 'ME-TOO' PRODUCTS THESE DAYS, RATHER THAN TAKING RISKS AND BEING AMBITIOUS, BUT IF THEY DON'T TAKE RISKS ANY MORE, PLAYERS WILL GET TIRED AT SOME POINT OF PLAYING THE SAME GAMES"

DAVID CAGE, QUANTIC DREAM

HAUNTING GROUND



Don't worry – it's supposed to look like that. It looks pretty funky in motion, though.

If you hear the lummox coming, jump in the shower and he'll never find you.

"THE ONLY HOPE FOR SURVIVAL IS TO TACTICALLY OUTSMART AND EVADE THE ABOMINATIONS THAT HUNT AND HAUNT YOU"
CAPCOM PRESS RELEASE

We've called this 'The Contraption'. We don't know how it works, but it does.

HAUNTING GROUND
PLAYSTATION2



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Strong titles like *Viewtiful Joe 2, Devil May Cry 3* and *Resident Evil 4*, and a healthy spread of more adventurous titles like *Okami* and *Killer7* on the horizon, mean that 2005 should prove to be a massive year for Capcom.

HISTORY

■ RESIDENT EVIL 4 2005 [Cube]
■ DINO CRISIS 3 2003 [Xbox]
■ THE MISADVENTURES OF TRON BONNE 2000 [PSone]



DON'T LET THE MAN GET YOU DOWN

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 29 April '05
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

CONCEPT

■ Run for your life around a mysterious mansion with the help of a dog. Trust us, it's a lot better than it sounds.

Why is it that survival horror games are synonymous with locked doors? The ones where the only key is in a locked desk on the other side of the mansion. The ones that are impractically 'locked from the other side'. And, of course, the ones where the lock is 'broken'. With no 'master of unlocking' on hand to sort matters out, *Haunting Ground* is only let off by virtue of the fact it has so many nice ideas to divert us from the decidedly round-the-houses routes we're forced to take.

Haunting Ground's manner of dealing with heroine Fiona's fear is its finest feature so far and a fantastic evolution of the ideas seen in the *Clock Tower* games. As well as stumbling around in a blind panic, other symptoms occur – movement becomes erratic, colours fade and image quality deteriorates. Get too het up and Fiona enters a state of frenzy, running around of her own accord as the controller vibrates; piercing staccato music kicks in and the poor girl's heart rate soars. Take a tumble in this state (made more likely by the fact that the on-screen action stutters and jumps) and you'll be looking at a single-hit death, but if you can escape your pursuer you'll calm down and all will be well.

The other element about which we had our doubts – Hewie, the game's canine co-star – has also turned out surprisingly well. He starts off cautious and isn't particularly eager to help, but by praising him for doing something well or scolding him when he doesn't listen, you can quickly train him to be quite the ally. He can search small areas, sniff out otherwise hidden goodies and even hold foes at bay to give you enough time to make your escape.

However, in the early stages it's fairly easy to tire of running from the lumbering Debilitas. His relentless pursuit frustrates as much as it scares, and while a selection of items will keep him at bay, you'll often just try to lead him to one of the points at which he can be taken out of the picture for a few minutes instead. Even setting Hewie on him is not without its drawbacks – he often gets side-tracked while you escape, and seeing as how you frequently need him to help solve puzzles or grab items, having him distracted elsewhere isn't much better than being chased. That said, there are some great ways to lose the lummox. Hiding in a cupboard or shower creates some truly tense moments as you wait for him to leave you alone, and when the camera cuts to a first-person view you know it's going to be a close call.

We've not ventured too far into *Haunting Ground* but it shows great potential. Annoyances so far are primarily with the game's opening as opposed to fundamental flaws, and we're hoping that later areas capitalise on the foundations that are so well laid. Transferring fear from character to player is notoriously hard, and *Haunting Ground* looks to be one of the best stabs at doing so that we've seen in ages. It would be easy to fall back on jumpy frights, so kudos to Capcom for trying something different.

"HAUNTING GROUND'S MANNER OF DEALING WITH FIONA'S FEAR IS ITS FINEST FEATURE SO FAR"

ALCHE-YOU, ALCHEMY

While you'll be able to find a nice array of goodies scattered around the castle and beyond (especially with the help of Hewie's nose), the real key to getting good items lies in the Medallions. You'll find several types of these scattered around and by using them in various strange machines you can create items more potent than you'd be likely to find in any useful quantity. Using the Medallions in a machine triggers a strange mini-game – stopping coloured spheres so as to complete lines across the contraption provides handy items; the more lines you manage to create, the better the end result will be. Fail to get enough lines, though, and you'll have lost out entirely. If nothing else, this mild diversion helps you forget that you're being chased by a giant lunatic…



■ "Wow, what a mansion." Where would we be today without *Resident Evil*'s stunning script?

COLIN MCRAE RALLY 2005



It's compulsory for every rally game to have a snow level. It's also compulsory for the snow level to be really annoying.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PSP
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
DEVELOPER: Six By Nine
RELEASE: Spring '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Get muddy on the bus with the PSP rendition of the most well-known rallying franchise in existence.

THE FINEST SCOTTISH EXPORT SINCE MCEWAN'S

With the imminent arrival of one of the most exciting pieces of hardware in years, it's no surprise that just about every game company is looking to get its biggest franchises in the launch line-up. However, despite being a positive indication of the success publishers are expecting the PSP to achieve, ports worry us. What value will the new handheld have if all its games are replications of games that people may very well already own for the PS2? In the case of *Colin McRae Rally 2005* for the PSP, Codemasters points out that this is a 'special edition' of the game, suitably tweaked and tailored to the unique features of the hardware.

Developed by Six By Nine, the team responsible for the PC conversions of *Colin McRae*s *3*, *04* and *2005*, the PSP version features a new way of saving progress. Instead of having to complete entire events of championships in one go, your progress is now auto-saved after each race, preventing you from losing all your hard work should your mud-spraying activities be interrupted by an unexpectedly early arrival at a station or bus stop.

In addition, PSP *Colin McRae* will also benefit from the wonder that is the PSP's in-built Wi-Fi communication technology. Up to eight players will be able to race each other while sat in pubs, public toilets or on buses.

Aside from the necessary PSP features, it's business as usual. Graphically, Six By Nine is doing a great job at getting the game looking and running just like the PS2 versions gone before. There are 30 cars to choose from, with four-wheel, rear-wheel and super two-wheel drive cars – and others – being represented. The car line-up will include the Audi A3 Quattro, Lancia Stratos and, of course, everyone's favourite, the Subaru Impreza.

The main brunt of the game will centre around the Career Challenge mode, offering various challenges, cups, 'SuperCups', shields and championships that span 23 events – that's a total of over 300 individual stages. In addition to this, expect the usual pick-up-and-play game modes, such as time trials and a quick race equivalent.

So, basically, it's *Colin McRae* on a handheld, adhering to – and making the most of – any new requirements or possibilities of the machine. Those who enjoy getting muddy in soggy fields will be right at home. However, it still remains to be seen how distinct this edition of the franchise will be and, indeed, whether it will be worth owning in addition to the main game on the PC or a console.



Is it us, or does the driver look a little bit big for this car? Look at the size of his head.

"THOSE WHO ENJOY GETTING MUDDY IN SOGGY FIELDS WILL BE RIGHT AT HOME"


eMag

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION



It's a Rockstar game so of course everything is going to look stylish.

THE VERY DEFINITION OF 'WIGGIDY-WACK' RACING

PS2

According to Rockstar, *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* is just as big a release as *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas.* This we can appreciate, although it's a slightly uneven comparison. *San Andreas,* to our mind, has no rival in terms of scale, polish, atmosphere or just sheer ambition. By contrast, we can easily name several high-speed, attitude-filled racing titles that have done well with the general public; indication enough that *Midnight Club 3* already has plenty of competition.

Naturally, Rockstar San Diego is striving to ensure that *DUB Edition* emerges victorious, combining the arcade thrills of *Burnout 3* with the car creativity of *Need For Speed Underground 2*, then throwing in a dose of over-the-top physics and special moves. This has led to a few adjustments in the game's structure – specifically, how you enter races (markers appear all over the city, meaning it's not just about trailing would-be roadsters and flashing your lights), and a new garage system that now feels like a garage rather than just a screen showing a list of cars. Race victory now rewards you with money and, in some cases, new car parts rather than kudos; head to the garage and you can turn your cash into all kinds of mods for your vehicles, be they performance-related (new breaks, shocks, engine, tyres and so on) or merely cosmetic.

It's on the egotistical side of the racing experience that Rockstar has gone to town. Changing everything from the paintjob and rims to logos, decals, neon chassis lights and even window tinting allows you to become more attached to your rides; and with so many licensed manufacturers and designs on offer, it's hard to know what to plump for. However, while this new approach to letting you tinker with your rides (as well as the need to buy the majority of your vehicles in the first place) brings things more in line with the competition, the retention of the core checkpoint-led concept helps the game stay true to its roots.

This means the return of open-plan maps that allow you to go pretty much anywhere (this time across Detroit, Atlanta and Seattle), along with race layouts that reward the most daring drivers – only those brave enough to race through standing traffic on two wheels, sharp enough to spot narrow alleys that can shave seconds off their time, and lucky enough to land the most ludicrous jumps in one piece can hope to come first.

If the adaptive AI that changes depending on your performance doesn't help, though, then the addition of special abilities specific to each vehicle class should make things slightly easier for those who find the going too tough; Focus (a bullet-time effect that makes taking corners at high speed easier), Agro (allowing you to bash your way through traffic) and Roar (a shockwave that sends any nearby cars flying) all become available once you've won enough class races, further changing the way you can approach each event.

Players worried that *DUB Edition* will follow in its predecessors' footsteps by being overly stringent in every regard will no doubt take solace in these changes, but it's the fans of the series who should be the most pleased. Instead of ripping the formula to pieces, Rockstar has polished it until it shines and then given it a pimping it'll never forget; just what the mechanic ordered.

> "DUB EDITION EXPANDS AND ENHANCES RATHER THAN INNOVATES, PILING MORE OF EVERYTHING ONTO THE ORIGINAL GAME"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego
RELEASE: 15 April '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8 Online)

CONCEPT

■ More nocturnal back-alley racing shenanigans, with more bling for your buck. Like the last *Midnight Club*, but on a far grander scale.

JUMP, JUMP

If you're the kind of person who likes to show off while you're leaving the opposition eating your dust, then investing in some hydraulics for your many different vehicles is going to be the way forward. With Hydraulic mode off, the trigger buttons perform their usual handbrake, nitrous, rear view and trick functions respectively. A quick downward tap on the D-pad, however, activates your hydraulics and maps a wheel to each of the buttons. From here, you can bounce and tip your car any way you choose in order to rub other drivers' noses in it, although obviously, you won't have access to your nitrous, handbrakes or tricks while you do. Still, it's worth it just for the look on your opponent's face…

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB EDITION

PLAYSTATION2/MULTIFORMAT



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Originally founded under the Angel Studios banner by Diego Angel in 1985, Rockstar San Diego was formed after Take 2 stepped in to buy the developer outright in 2003. Previously, the studio had worked with Take 2 on both the *Midnight Club* and *Smuggler's Run* franchises.

HISTORY

- **MIDNIGHT CLUB: STREET RACING** 2000 [Multi]
- **SMUGGLER'S RUN** 2000 [Multi]
- **MIDTOWN MADNESS** 1999 [PC]

"WE ARE POISED TO ONCE AGAIN PUSH THE BOUNDARIES OF SPEED AND STYLE WELL BEYOND ANYTHING EVER SEEN BEFORE IN RACING GAMES"

DAN HOUSER, VP CREATIVITY, ROCKSTAR GAMES



VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DROP IT LIKE IT'S HOT

MIDNIGHT CLUB II × PIMP MY RIDE + VARIETY = MC3: DUB EDITION

The option to race around on two wheels is there if you like to feel the wind in your hair.



RISE

AND FALL: CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR

FIFTY MILLION SOLDIERS CAN'T BE WRONG

The strategy genre has really come of age in the last few years. Gone are the days of simple resource management, where the most effective 'strategy' is to produce the maximum number of troops, charge your opponents and win. No, today's strategy games push both hardware and player to the very limit, throwing around literally thousands of troops at a time and making you think very carefully about every single decision. With hundreds of lives in the balance, there's no chance of replacing lost soldiers before the enemy makes its move, meaning a single mistake can set up your downfall.

But now the genre has started to evolve further still, offering even more involvement by placing the player in the thick of the action at key moments. But what can Midway's latest acquisition, *Rise And Fall*, do to make its mark on the genre? We tracked down Rick Goodman, president and founder of Stainless Steel Studios, to find out.

"The year is 300BC. You're deep in enemy territory and in command of the Greek forces. Before you, fanatical Persians prepare for battle. The question is, how do you conquer a civilisation that is the mightiest on Earth?" In all honesty, we don't know. Suggestions of a nuclear dinosaur army or a really big gun fall on deaf ears with the strategy experts – it quickly becomes clear that *Rise And Fall* is a game firmly grounded in reality and

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: Stainless Steel Studios
RELEASE: Q4 '05
GENRE: Real-Time Strategy
PLAYERS: 1 (2-8 Online)

HISTORY

Rick Goodman's prestigious past is enough to all but guarantee the quality and scope of *Rise And Fall.*

CONCEPT

Take four of the most powerful and famous ancient civilisations and make them fight on an incredible scale. Then grow your empire and become the envy of all the world. Sounds easy, right?



Got several hundred troops? Chuck 'em all into battle at once and see what happens…

that our silly ideas really won't get us very far.

At its heart, *Civilizations At War* can be divided into two main elements. On the warfare front, huge battles will decide the fate of your empire and earn you new settlements, while at home you'll need to manage politics and economies in order to keep a firm hold on your existing cities.

"There is more to conquering a vast empire than simply crushing enemy towns and cities," says Goodman. "When a city falls, do you butcher the population or show them mercy?" It's a sound question. The massive scale and fundamental cause-and-effect nature of the game will make each choice such as this unique and important, but there are many more examples like it. "Suppose a mercenary army arrives and demands payment for remaining neutral. Do you pay or wage a two-sided battle?" ask Goodman. "These are the types of decisions that must be made at each stage in the game and every decision the player makes is meaningful and carries a set of consequences."

Taking enemy towns and cities will play a major role in *Rise And Fall* but it won't be as easy as simply walking in and waiting for the white flags to go up. Chances are your approach will be noticed and defences readied accordingly, but luckily you'll have access to a range of allies that make up for being inanimate by being huge and devastatingly powerful.

"Siege warfare is cunning and brutal – you must besiege and breach impregnable fortified cities with the siege engines," Goodman explains. "To do this, the player can employ a wide variety of colossal weapons. Catapults launch boulders, slamming into soldiers and troop formations. Battering rams pound away at towering walls. Siege towers rumble up to fortifications and unload the attackers, who storm the battlements. Walls and buildings crumble to the ground a crash of debris and dust, sending soldiers falling to their deaths." Stainless Steel's head honcho paints a lovely picture of the mass slaughter, but after seeing it in action, we have to admit that even he doesn't really do it justice.

TAKING ON THE WORLD

As well as two lengthy single-player campaigns, *Rise And Fall* will also offer a selection of online and LAN multiplayer modes to maintain longevity after you've conquered the world alone. As you might expect, these generally focus on versus play but there are some interesting additions. One such mode sees you team up with another player, and while one of you sits back and sorts out the strategic side of things, the other wades in and gets their hands dirty in the third-person Hero mode. Just how many multiplayer modes or maps will be available is still very much up in the air – the game isn't out until the end of the year, after all – but if there's more innovation such as this on offer, *Rise And Fall* should prove quite the strategic feast.

> "RISE AND FALL IS THE MOST COMPLETE HISTORICAL REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME TO DATE"
>
> *DAVID ZUCKER, PRESIDENT, MIDWAY GAMES*

It's the individual animations and stupidly varied action that really sets these sieges apart from anything else we've seen in recent memory. Foot soldiers will set up ladders only to have them smashed, allowing gravity to govern their fate. Structure collapses are far from the usual 'cloud of dust, building sinks through ground' fare – chunks of masonry tumble from impact craters while battering rams cave in walls, much to the dismay of soldiers unfortunate enough to be on the battlements above. It's this individuality that makes *Civilizations At War* such a joy to watch and no two battles will ever be alike. And it's not just on land that you'll need to defend your empire.

"As a naval commander, you must use your fleet to transport troops across the Mediterranean Sea, fight through naval blockades and siege coastal cities and towns," Goodman says. From the demonstration we were given, it was abundantly clear that water-based warfare would be far from a throwaway element – just as much cunning and guile will be needed to outwit your foes at sea

DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ Leaving Microsoft's side after heading the *Age Of Empires* team, Rick Goodman formed Stainless Steel Studios with a vision of creating quality strategy titles for the worldwide market. Stainless Steel's Titan engine is among the most versatile in the strategy genre.

HISTORY

■ **EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD** 2003 [PC]
■ **EMPIRE EARTH** 2001 [PC]

RACE FOR THE PRIZE

Like all good strategy games, *Rise And Fall* will offer several different civilisations for you to command. There are four main empires in the shape of the Persians, Greeks, Egyptians and Romans, then four smaller factions – namely Carthaginians, Babylonians, Gaul-Barbarians and Assyrians – each with their own unique heroes and units to ensure that all are balanced and worth using. Which will you use to conquer the globe?

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

"THAT IS NOT CIVILISED..."

ROME: TOTAL WAR + KUF: THE CRUSADERS - DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 = RISE AND FALL

■ Epic battles are the order of the day, and the detail is mind-blowing.

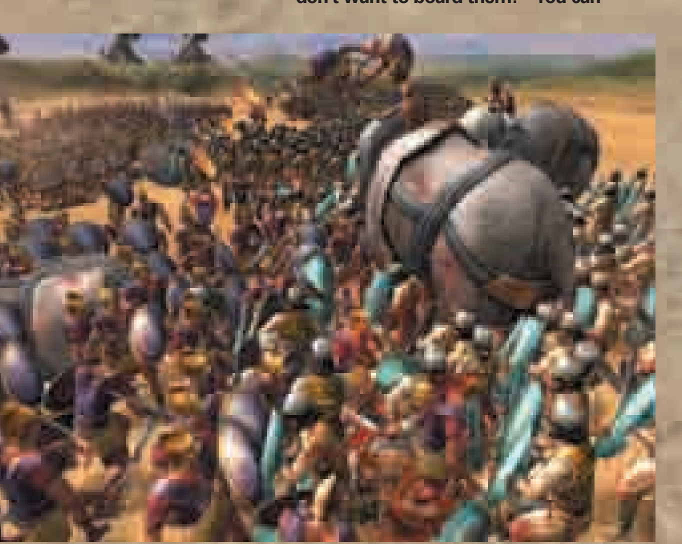
You'll have to get your hands dirty on water as well as on land. So book those swimming lessons.

as on the land. "Your success will hinge upon your ability to co-ordinate assaults," Goodman continues "Outfitting your ships with skilled archers enables you to rain down arrows upon enemy vessels, stripping them of their crew. Equipping your warships with catapults enables you to lay siege to cities directly from the ocean, far from the shore. Deploy veteran swordsmen on your ships to grapple and board enemy vessels then capture them and add them to your ever growing fleet."

This looks absolutely phenomenal in action, the crew tugging the opposing vessel near enough before leaping over and engaging in close-quarters combat for command of the ship. But what if you don't want to board them? "You can choose to deploy the superweapon of the seas, naval ramming, which pulverises both ship and crew in one masterful thrust," explains Goodman. He shows us. Sure enough, his use of the term "awesome destructive power" is no overstatement. Splinters fly and sailors are thrown overboard as the ship on the receiving end is savagely torn to shreds.

"WITH HUNDREDS OF LIVES IN THE BALANCE, THERE'S NO CHANCE OF REPLACING LOST SOLDIERS BEFORE THE ENEMY MAKES ITS MOVE"

But there's more to creating destruction than simply buying the best machinery. "Alexander The Great was a legendary general. Commanding his troops from the front line, he led the charge into battle and was the first to smash into enemy spears." While Goodman's history lesson is fascinating, why's he telling us this now? He explains. "You will experience this heroic charge. You are the game's ultimate superweapon." Like last year's *Kingdom Under Fire*, *Rise And Fall* will offer not just strategy but third-person action as well. But don't just think you can run in and clean up, *Dynasty Warriors*-style. "Spectacular moments of battlefield



CLASH OF THE TITANS

In the words of Stainless Steel's Rick Goodman, "*Rise And Fall* is a world that awaits your conquest in a way you've never experienced before." While this might sound a touch arrogant, you can't help but think that he could be right. While most elements here have been implemented elsewhere to a high standard – the *Total War* series is the new benchmark for epic strategy, *Kingdom Under Fire* merged thinking with action-based gameplay, while you could name any number of PC titles that have embraced resource management and economics with aplomb – combining the three is a real challenge, and one that Stainless Steel is clearly keen to tackle head-on.





GENRE PROFILE

■ Now one of the most heavily populated and well contested genres on the PC, it's strange to think that the real-time strategy game as we know it finds its roots primarily in console games such as *Cannon Fodder* and *Herzog Zwei*.

HISTORY

- ■ **COMMAND AND CONQUER** 1995 [PC]
- ■ **DUNE II: BATTLE FOR ARRAKIS** 1992 [Multi]
- ■ **HERZOG ZWEI** 1989 [Mega Drive]



heroism are precious and few so you must decide the critical moment to lead the charge over enemy ramparts," Goodman says, but details of just how long you'll get in the shoes of your chosen general's sandals is yet to be confirmed. What is known, though, is that this is going to be a key way of turning battles around if used well. "Command wisely and you can turn the tide of battle. Make a mistake and Greek soldiers will litter the battlefield." And nobody wants that. Except maybe your opponents, but what they want doesn't matter. This is war.

"What kind of hero will you be? How will you conquer the armies, navies and cities that defy you? How will you choose the critical moment to personally lead your troops into battle? These are the decisions you'll face in *Rise And Fall*," Goodman concludes and for once, it's plain to see that all this talk of choices, potential and involvement isn't just PR waffle. While still relatively early in development, *Rise And Fall* has shown enough promise to tickle our strategy glands and start the hype machine rolling.

Midway may not be best known for its strategy output – indeed, *Rise And Fall* is its first foray into this difficult genre – but with the ability and reputation of Goodman and Stainless Steel behind it, we're confident that this will be one of the big PC games to watch for in the latter half of the year. Midway's unveiling of such a strong-looking title so close to E3 must have set a few knees knocking among other PC exhibitors.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

WHO WILL YOU PLAY AS, WHO WILL YOU CONQUER, AND HOW WILL YOU DO IT?

Despite the fact that big names like Alexander and Cleo will be hogging the limelight, Sargon, Darius and co will be sure to get a look in. Expect to see trained elephants doing a little trampling, as well as an human army to be reckoned with. Just because you might not have heard of them doesn't mean they won't beat you into the ground…

YOU'RE THE ONE THAT I WANT

Under the watchful eye of Alexander The Great, send trained elephants and heavily populated naval vessels into battle along with your armies to increase your chance of victory. With the mighty Achilles also by your side, anyone who has been forced to endure *Troy* will know exactly what not to expect.

CIRCLE IN THE SAND

As the terrible girl group once sang, "Cleopatra coming at ya." Sure enough, the famous Queen of Egypt is on hand to lead her army against all who would oppose her. With a surprisingly advanced taste for battle, the Egyptian forces will come down on those that underestimate them like a ton of invisible lead soup. Spitting camels have yet to be confirmed.

ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED?

Don your armour and flush Russell Crowe's silly gruff mumblings from your mind. As the mighty Julius Caesar, expand the Roman Empire by crushing your foes with precision and force. Heavily protected legions of troops will charge into battle, scything through enemy formations as Caesar tries to claim global supremacy. How hard can it be?



LA RUSH


Plenty of lighting effects and motion blur. Squint a bit and you can almost see the *Burnout 3* HUD…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-TBC

CONCEPT

Having been most everywhere else, the *Rush* series heads to the City of Angels for more racing, smashing and general dangerous driving fun.

HURRY, HURRY, LOVER COME TO ME

PS2 **When it comes to game presentations, there's nothing worse than seeing one thing and being told another.** As much as Midway was keen to highlight the fact that *Rush* isn't chasing the same market as *Need For Speed* and *Midnight Club*, the trailer we were shown did nothing to back up this point. Ridiculously shiny custom beasts tore around a ridiculously shiny city, but just as we were starting to lose interest, the in-game demo began. Suddenly, things started to pick up. Here's a fast-paced racing game that, while a lot closer to its high-profile rivals than the developer may like to admit, brings plenty of new ideas to the figurative table. Phew.

As the name would suggest, you'll have a sizeable chunk of Los Angeles to explore at your leisure. The 'story' sees your garage being ransacked and all your pimped-out rides being stolen, so as well as competitive and checkpoint races there'll be 'missions' such as losing pursuers and getting from A to B in one piece as you retrieve your wheels.

To make getting across downtown LA in rush hour slightly easier, there are literally thousands of alternate routes and short cuts scattered about the city – scream down back alleys, jump to rooftops and smash through windows or even scenery to reach your destination in the quickest time possible.

Showing us comparisons of sections of the game with other re-creations of Los Angeles (such as the God-awful *True Crime: Streets Of LA*) was a masterstroke on the part of the publisher and it's looking as though we could get to see the city at its very finest. With little additions such as a guide arrow governed by an intelligent GPS system and plenty of modding options for the 50-plus cars, treating the entire city as a vehicular playground couldn't be much easier.

We're looking forward to trying this for ourselves at E3 – handling and AI will be fundamental to the game's success, and while the presentation certainly gave us a taste of what to expect, there's nothing quite like getting behind the wheel for yourself. Expect a more in-depth test run in a couple of months' time. Until then, you can either play *True Crime* or study a few maps to learn the LA street layouts. We can tell you right now which would be more entertaining…

"IT'S LIKE MIDNIGHT CLUB BUT WITHOUT ALL THE TRIAL-AND-ERROR GAMEPLAY. WHICH IS NICE"


Why are the cops after us? Oh yeah. Speeding is totally illegal, isn't it?

Now that's just shameless vandalism. Unfortunately, shameless vandalism is a lot of fun.


eMag

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

LET THE BODIES HIT THE FLOOR

PS2

While it's nice to give beat-'em-up characters a bit of background to explain why they're fighting and where they're from, full-blown plots often verge on the ridiculous. Case in point: the story in *Mortal Kombat*. While it may have started off as a relatively coherent string of profiles and events, things have snowballed as the series has dragged on; get to the more recent titles and you have a jumbled mess of clashing ideas, loose ends and confusion about what did and didn't happen.

But even Midway doesn't feel that the story around the time of *MK2* is explained well enough, as that's where *Shaolin Monks* picks up. You'll explore Outworld 'in its entirety' and, along the way, do battle in many classic arenas, all scrubbed up for 2005. Plenty of the cast will also be on hand to offer you your ass on a silver platter if you don't make the cut – Scorpion, Mileena, Goro and Baraka will be among the familiar faces and there are set to be plenty of one-on-one boss encounters to really test your mettle.

The idea of multi-directional kombat (ahem) fills us with fear, and a recent demo of the game did little to ease this. Using an analogue stick to control any kind of fighting is a disastrous concept that has never worked (save, perhaps, for the simplified fare of *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*) and judging by the amount of times we saw Liu Kang or Kung Lao flailing into thin air during an 'awesome' combo, this looks to be what *Shaolin Monks* will use.

Regardless, there's talk of modifier buttons to open up more attacks, with grapples, juggles and special moves straight out of the original games (fireballs, hat throws et al). All of these can be upgraded as you progress, gaining range and power until you're some kind of freight train of a man and nothing can stop you.

The emphasis isn't all on basic melee combat, however. Environmental kills will be familiar to anyone who's had a brush with a recent *Kombat* – hapless grunts can be thrown into spikes, crushers, flames or indeed anything that looks as though it could cause pain. This will apparently be used as the foundation for 'puzzles' (in the loosest sense of the word), requiring you to make human platforms on spikes to reach higher levels or use the weight of an enemy to pull down a platform for you.

But, of course, it wouldn't be *Mortal Kombat* without Fatalities. These take the form of events that celebrate a good run of mutilation, rewarding a quick mini-game with a suitably brutal finishing move. We're promised 10 to 15 finishing moves per character, ranging from decapitations and hat slices to breaking every bone in some poor sap's body. These will also have multiple levels, building up from relatively simple finishers to so-called Multalities and Brutalities, doing terminal damage to multiple foes in ever more ridiculous ways.

May's E3 will be our first chance to spend proper quality time with *Shaolin Monks*, and while our initial impressions may not be as glowing as other sources, we'll keep an open mind. So long as it controls okay there's hope for *Shaolin Monks*, and between the two-player support and the strength of the brand we're pretty sure Midway won't mess this up entirely. If nothing else, few games this year will allow you to unleash your inner sadist like this should.


"THERE WILL BE FEW GAMES THIS YEAR THAT WILL ALLOW YOU TO UNLEASH YOUR INNER SADIST LIKE THIS SHOULD"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Midway
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: Adventure/ Beat-'Em-Up
PLAYERS: 1-2

CONCEPT

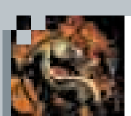
Kung Lao and Liu Kang cut loose from one-on-one brawling for a fully fledged fighting adventure.

DOUBLE DOWN

Things are pretty messy to begin with but bring a friend to the table and *Shaolin Monks* gets bloodier still. As well as being able to hack up crowds in half the time, ko-operation (how it pains us to misspell it so) is also rewarded with bonuses and special moves, the biggest of which sees all manner of silly effects kick off as each player has to time correct button presses to increase combo damage. As well as double the killing power, having two guys running around will allow, nay require, you to use each warrior's individual skills – wall running, teleporting and such – to solve puzzles and make your way through Outworld.



Remember me? I've got too many arms and I really want to hurt you.



SERIES PROFILE

While the long-running series has definitely found its niche over here, Americans simply can't get enough of Midway's bloody brawlers. *Deception* scored nines (and equivalents) across the board despite several fundamental flaws and the prospect of *Shaolin Monks* has them drooling like they've just met Mr Wimpy.

HISTORY

- **MORTAL KOMBAT: SPECIAL FORCES** 2000 [PSone]
- **MORTAL KOMBAT 4** 1997 [Multi]
- **MORTAL KOMBAT** 1992 [Multi]

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

WHAT KEEPS THE BLOOD FLOWING?

MORTAL KOMBAT × PRINCE OF PERSIA + KO-OPERATION = MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

"WE'RE BASICALLY RETELLING THE STORY OF MK2 BUT THIS TIME WE'RE ADDING ALL THE MISSING PATHS"

MIDWAY PRESS RELEASE

Not all familiar faces want you dead – Cage lends his fists to your noble cause.

You can go it alone but things will be a bit tougher than with two. Unsurprisingly.

TIMESHIFT



Expect to see many different types of weapon in *TimeShift*. It is an FPS, after all.

TIME WAITS FOR NO MAN. UNTIL NOW…

In a world of missed opportunities, regrets and bad decisions, it's understandable why people spend a lot of time thinking about being able to change the past. At Saber Interactive, they also think deeply about ways of changing the past, though their motivation for indulging in time manipulation seems more due to wanting to push the FPS boundaries than the exorcism of personal demons.

While it would be easy to write off *TimeShift* as a clone of ideas showcased in *Prince Of Persia*, it uses time control in a completely different way. *Prince Of Persia* offered a way to reverse the on-screen action, which offered the benefit of being able to rewind moments when you mistimed jumps, for instance. However, in *TimeShift* you don't control things in this simple way – you're in control of the world around you, but not you specifically.

Confused? Imagine walking down the road and seeing someone leave a newsagent with a winning scratch card in their hand. Imagine being able to rewind time to the point before this person bought the card. Your location stays the same, but everything moves around you. This would allow you to hide, rewind time and then nip into the shop and buy the card before the other person. Or you could stop time altogether, steal the card from their hand and run away before restarting time. This is sort of the way things work in *TimeShift*, except your use of time extends beyond morally dubious opportunism.

> "TIMESHIFT HAS BEEN GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO STAND OUT IN A HEAVILY POPULATED GENRE"

While the brunt of the action is your usual blend of first-person gunplay and exploration, many of the game's puzzles and scenarios will require you to work your time-bending abilities into your strategy instead of just running forwards and blowing away anything that moves.

For instance, one section requires the player to make their way onto a station platform, although it's inaccessible from the point where you approach the section. The only way to deal with this is to wait for a train to leave the station, jump onto the train and then rewind time to a point before the train had departed. Thinking this way may take a little getting used to, but it's necessary in order to progress. How deep and complex this goes is uncertain, but we're sure players are going to have to think outside the box pretty often.

Also uncertain is how this power will be governed. If the power depletes as it's used, players could find it impossible to get through certain sections. On the other hand, if the power is infinite players will find engaging opposing soldiers fairly effortless given that the obvious solution to any gunfight is to simply stop time and blast groups of enemies without worrying about any return fire.

This also raises the question of how enemies will react to your time frippery. It will be disappointing if the developer has missed opportunities to create believable reactions from the soldiers, such as jumps of fright caused by unexpected and unseen attacks or puzzled expressions as you vanish from view. We're looking forward to experimenting with this and gauging a soldier's reaction when we stop time, kill his friends then restart time.

TimeShift has a real opportunity to stand out in a heavily populated genre by offering ideas and gameplay that are genuinely new and exciting. But will it succeed? Or will it join a list of games that let us down at the last minute? In this case, time really will tell.

SPIT 'N' POLISH

***TimeShift* is promising to push the FPS boundaries in terms of graphics and level design. Saber Interactive has produced its own Saber3D game engine, which it says incorporates "ground-breaking graphics technology" able to create impressively detailed textures and characters as well as "advanced parallax lighting" allowing for a realistic depth to the environment. Going by the screenshots this is no empty boast. *TimeShift*, despite being early in development, is looking highly detailed with a unique style, which is always good for FPS titles wishing to make their mark. Also a product of the Saber3D engine will be realistic physics for characters and objects, so expect lots of rag-doll effects on the characters then…**

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Saber Interactive
RELEASE: Q3 '05
GENRE: First-Person Shooter
PLAYERS: TBA

CONCEPT

Freak out your enemies by bending time and using the effect to your advantage in this gritty FPS from Saber Interactive.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

■ Despite using the name Atari, Atari is not actually Atari. No, the company now called Atari was once Infogrames, who after buying up the Atari brand decided it best to use the name for all its releases. Since the name change, 'Atari' has published numerous games under the brand, including the much-sniggered at *Driv3r*.

HISTORY

- **TRANSFORMERS** 2004 [PS2]
- **DRIV3R** 2004 [Multi]
- **UNREAL II** 2003 [PC]

"INTEGRATING TIME INTO THE FABRIC OF GAMEPLAY WILL SHIFT PERCEPTIONS OF WHAT A FIRST-PERSON SHOOTER CAN BE"
MARTIN SPIESS, SENIOR VP MARKETING, ATARI

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIME OUT

HALO + PRINCE OF PERSIA x THE WORLD AROUND YOU = TIMESHIFT

■ Don't worry too much about missing your shot and alerting the guards to your presence. Simply rewind time and try again.


eMag

SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE



Will this still be fun considering we've already seen much of it on the GameCube?

THE ULTIMATE WAY TO MONKEY AROUND?

PS2 **When *Super Monkey Ball* was launched with the GameCube, most species blessed with opposable thumbs were playing it.** Parties were organised with the game in mind and the more determined among us spent many an hour locked away in our bedrooms honing our skills, just so we could gloat to our friends about our new-found ability to conquer the top E on that infamous guitar stage.

The aim of the game was simple: get your monkey to the end of each level by manipulating his surroundings and letting gravity play its part. If you were after the top scores you could deviate from the simplest route to collect bananas – a risky business as it usually required you to take on a strip of land resembling an angular tightrope in order to grab just one of the potassium-rich fruits – but that was about it. Genius.

The addition of mini-games guaranteed many hours of multiplayer fun and the whole thing was repeated with more levels and additional multiplayer games in 2002 when *Super Monkey Ball 2* made an appearance. Arguably the only element that prevented the title taking over the entire gaming population was the fact that both games were exclusive to the Cube.

Well, this is no longer the case. *Super Monkey Ball Deluxe* seems to be Sega's attempt to replicate the series' success on the consoles that missed out. This should come as good news to PS2 and Xbox owners, as *DX* will include all the levels from both games –114 from *Super Monkey Ball* and 140 from *Super Monkey Ball 2* – as well as 46 brand new stages and all of the superb multiplayer action of both titles.

From the looks of things, this is going to be a gem of a package for those who have shunned the GameCube and have therefore missed out on the monkey mayhem, but we do have to wonder whether gamers who have already played through the two Cube titles will find enough here to persuade them to hand over their money. The few new levels and the new Ultimate mode – which will gel the difficulty levels into one fluid learning curve, rather than breaking them down into different gameplay sections – may not be enough to warrant adding yet another monkey-covered box to your games collection.

"THIS IS A GEM OF A PACKAGE FOR THOSE WHO HAVE SHUNNED THE GAMECUBE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: PS2, Xbox
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Sega
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: April 22 '05
GENRE: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-4

CONCEPT

Control everyone's favourite ball-bound monkeys, mastering everything the series can offer – and more.



Racing, fighting, gliding – is there nothing these monkeys can't do?

As you can see, all the multiplayer games have been re-created faithfully.

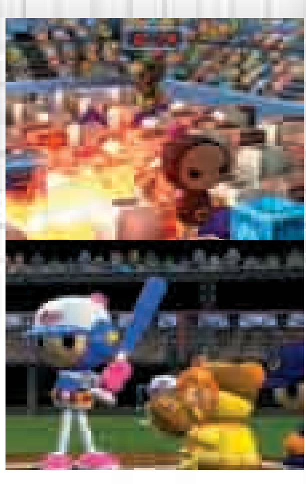
SHOWCASE

MORE THINGS TO WATCH FOR ON THE GAMING HORIZON

BOMBERMAN HARDBALL

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Ubisoft
Developer: Hudson Soft
Genre: Action Puzzle
Players: 1-4



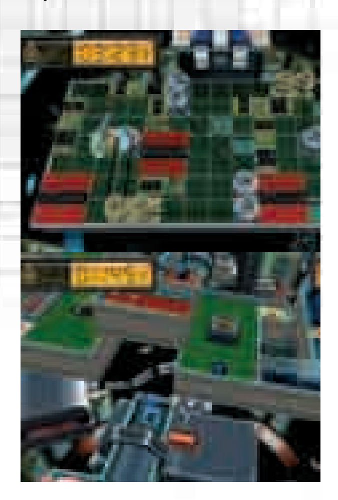
Hasn't it already been proved on the N64 that *Bomberman* in three dimensions doesn't work? We remember the horrible incident, but it appears that Hudson has forgotten – if it hadn't, *Bomberman Hardball* probably wouldn't exist. How the developer plans to resolve the problems created by moving the oh-so-simple gameplay into 3D (particularly that of not being able to see the playing field properly) isn't clear, but we suspect it isn't through the addition of the Golf, Tennis and Baseball modes that change the game into anything but *Bomberman*. The concept of not fixing things that aren't broken appears to have gone out the window, so to expect the best *Bomberman* game yet from *Hardball* is optimistic.

RELEASE DATE: Q2 '05

SMART BOMB

TICK, TICK, TICK, TICK, BOOM

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: UK
Publisher: Eidos
Developer: Core Design
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1-4



Well done, Core. By 'borrowing' the underlying concept for *Smart Bomb* from one of our favourite PSone games – *Suzuki Bakuhatsu*, Enix's bizarre bomb-defusing title – you've snagged our interest. True, this PSP offering features a far more serious plot than Enix's game, but that makes little difference because the premise remains the same: solve 3D puzzles of increasing complexity, working your way through a stage's layers until you can 'defuse' the detonator underneath. Sounds simple, but (of course) it's not; there are over a hundred levels and several play modes, not to mention the decreasing time limits and increasing difficulty that will create tension we haven't seen in a game since… well, *Suzuki Bakuhatsu*.

RELEASE DATE: Q2 '05

THE FOOL AND HIS MONEY

SO CLOSE WE CAN TASTE IT

Format: PC, Macintosh
Origin: US
Publisher: N/A
Developer: Cliff Johnson
Genre: Puzzle
Players: 1



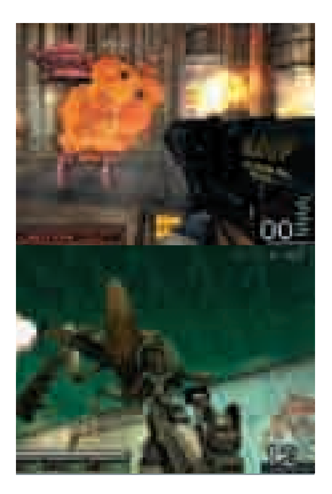
It is our mission in life, we believe, to make you love the works of Cliff Johnson. This isn't just so you can play some of the most taxing and enjoyable puzzle games ever created, such as *The Fool's Errand* or *3 In Three*, but also so you're prepared for the release of *The Fool And His Money* – a sequel some 18 years in the making that fans of the previous game have been crying out for. According to the man himself, we can expect to see "familiar challenges of words and wit with new twists and turns, and other enchantments, unfamiliar, that tease and tantalise with hands-on visual mischief." Although if you've played the original, you'll know that sounds a lot easier than it actually is.

RELEASE DATE: 5 JULY '05

CODED ARMS

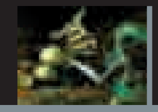
KONAMI TRIES TO HACK THE PLANET

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: Japan
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House
Genre: FPS
Players: 1



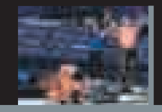
Bringing an FPS to a handheld has been done before, but doing it well seems difficult, so Konami deserves a round of applause for doing so, even if the icing on this delicious cake is rather stale. Abandoned computer system, blah blah, evolving AI, yadda yadda, hacker breaks in to kill everything and save the day – not exactly ground-breaking, considering *Tron 2.0* already did this in a far superior way on the plot front. However, by evoking visual shades of the *Zone Of The Enders* series, *Coded Arms* manages to create a smooth and attractive world in which to blast three types of enemy (yes, only three) with over 30 weapons (slightly better), which is just what we'd want from a handheld FPS.

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05



Delayed – The Legend Of Zelda (GameCube)

■ Forget mid-2005 – an interview with Nintendo's Eiji Aonuma shifts the release of the next *Zelda* game to a Christmas release in Japan. So that'll be early 2006 for us Europeans, then…



Delayed – WWE WrestleMania 21 (Xbox)

■ Originally due before the annual grappling spectacular, El Gigante's brawler has been put back until the end of April to allow for some extra polishing.

PILOT DOWN: BEHIND ENEMY LINES

DOWN AND DIRTY

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC
Origin: UK
Publisher: Oxygen Interactive
Developer: Kuju Entertainment
Genre: Action/Adventure
Players: 1





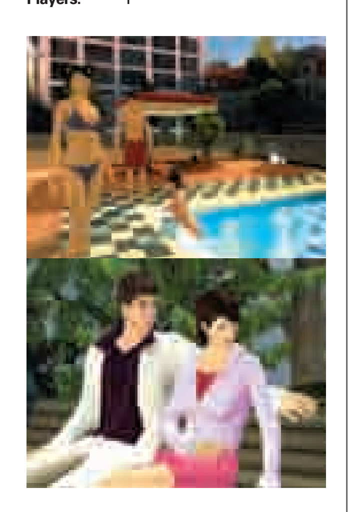
Given the abysmal state of *Conspiracies: Weapons Of Mass Destruction* and the potential disaster that is *Advance Wars: Under Fire*, you'd think that Kuju was due a decent title. While we're not holding our breath, it's possible *Pilot Down* could be 'the one'. Using a cel-shaded cartoon style not usually associated with World War II titles, the game places you as a lone US airman who has to use his stealth skills to escape from behind enemy lines (but you could guess that from the title). Certainly some interesting ideas could bring this one alive – not resting causes fatigue, while overexposure leads to hypothermia – but it's hard to see how the game will advance the stealth genre in a more functional sense.

RELEASE DATE: MAY '05

SINGLES 2: TRIPLE TROUBLE

THREE'S A CROWD

Format: PC
Origin: Germany
Publisher: Deep Silver
Developer: Rotobee
Genre: Strategy
Players: 1



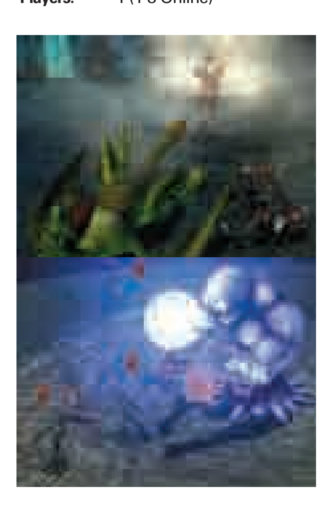
And there we were, hoping the *Singles* series had been quietly buried after just one game. Unfortunately, that isn't the case; Deep Silver has seen fit to create yet more awkward sexual situations by throwing an ex-partner into the sequel's mix, leading to what will no doubt be seen as hilariously erotic japes by those desperate enough for such action. By comparison, we'd rather see the fixing of everything that was wrong with the original – particularly the clichéd way the characters interact and the complete lack of anything to do – but we suspect that might be too much to ask. Only 15 quests, the vague promise of 'lots of improved features' and 'a few' additional characters outside the lead three? Sounds riveting…

RELEASE DATE: MAY '05

ARC THE LAD: END OF DARKNESS

INTO THE LIGHT

Format: PlayStation2
Origin: Japan
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Namco Hometek
Genre: RPG
Players: 1 (1-8 Online)



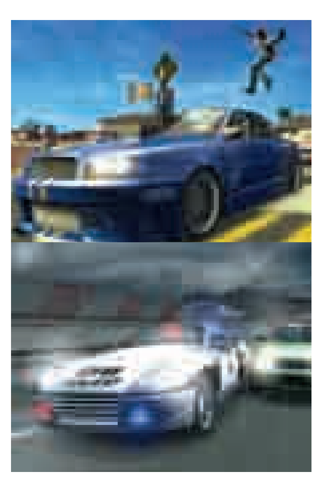
Another *Arc The Lad* game? Oh, Namco, you're spoiling us. Set five years after *Twilight Of The Spirits* (but remaining in the same world), *End Of Darkness* brings the same level of depth and complexity to the table as players lead main hero Edda (boring beachcomber-cum-fully fledged exorcist) on a "remarkable journey that will ultimately put civilisation against nature". Press-release talk aside, the idea of being able to take your single-player character online to play with up to eight other people in four-on-four battles, or in a team-based co-op mode where teams of four complete missions and hunt for rare items, is something that piques our adventuring interest. We just hope a UK release isn't too far away.

RELEASE DATE: MAY '05 (US)

PURSUIT FORCE

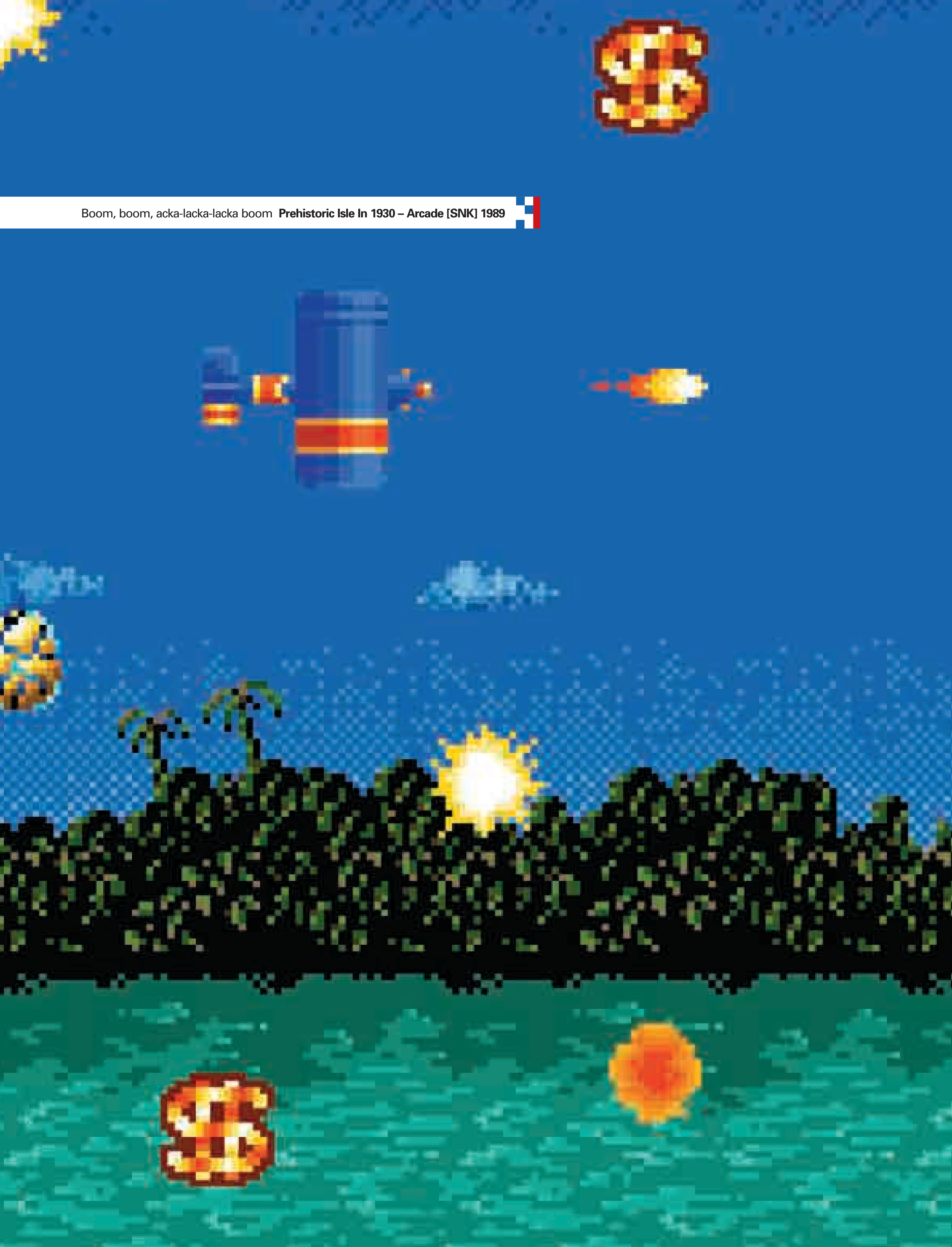
OOH, CHASE ME

Format: PlayStation Portable
Origin: UK
Publisher: SCEE
Developer: Bigbig Studios
Genre: Driving
Players: 1



To say that *Pursuit Force* can't really decide what kind of game it wants to be is a bit of an understatement, but we're still intrigued by what Bigbig Studios is trying to create. At first, it sounds like a carbon copy of *Chase HQ* with you (as the cocky yet heroic street-tough cop) chasing after groups of bad guys in your souped-up police car 'in pursuit of justice'. However, throw in the ability to change vehicles mid-pursuit by literally leaping from car to car – yes, really – and you've got some kind of weird action/driving/combat hybrid that we almost certainly won't fully understand until Sony gets around to showing it to us. Shame these mocked-up 'in-game' screens don't give much away…

RELEASE DATE: Q3 '05

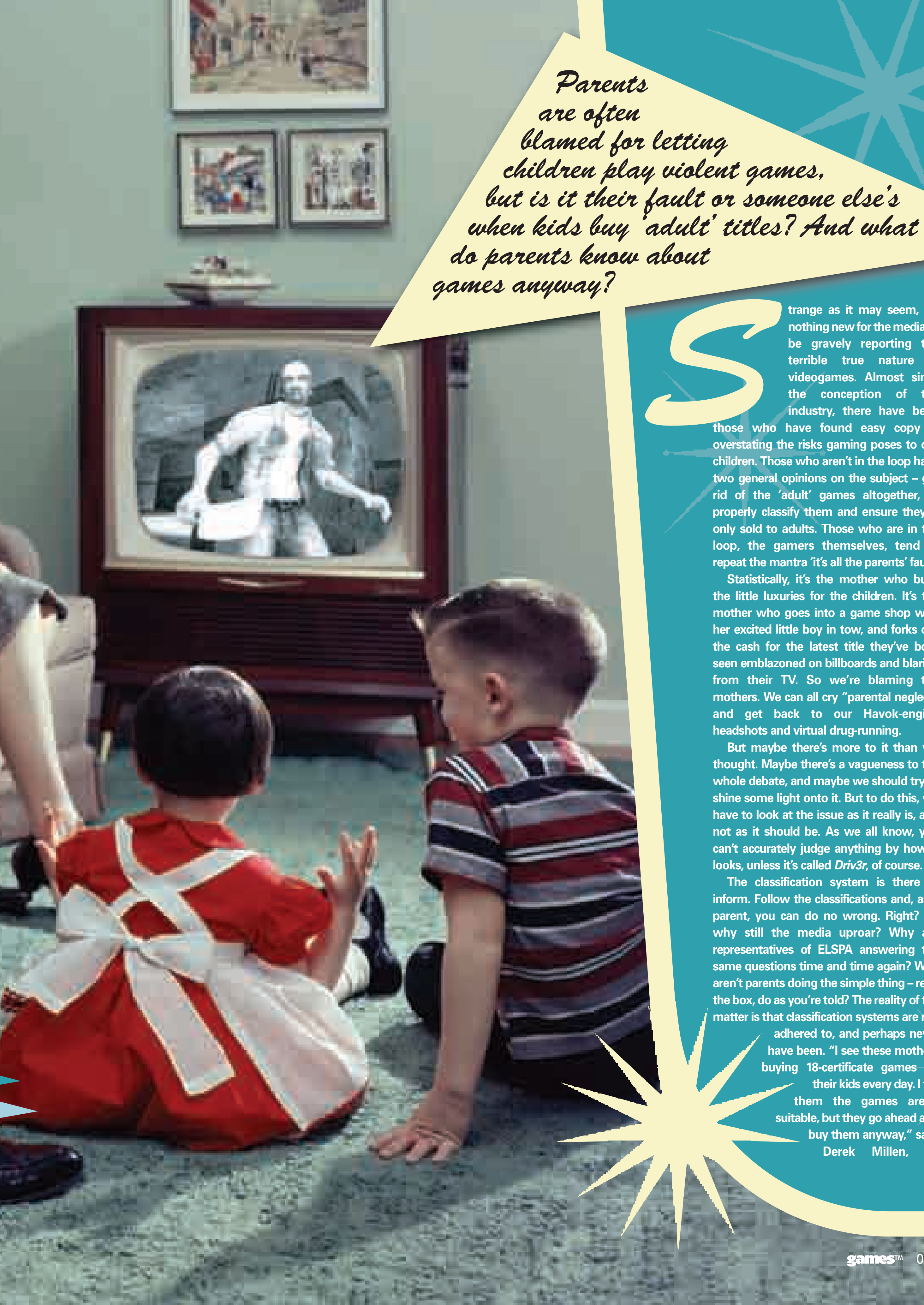


Boom, boom, acka-lacka-lacka boom **Prehistoric Isle In 1930 – Arcade [SNK] 1989**


CREDIT 04



Watch with mother



Parents are often blamed for letting children play violent games, but is it their fault or someone else's when kids buy 'adult' titles? And what do parents know about games anyway?

Strange as it may seem, it's nothing new for the media to be gravely reporting the terrible true nature of videogames. Almost since the conception of the industry, there have been those who have found easy copy in overstating the risks gaming poses to our children. Those who aren't in the loop have two general opinions on the subject – get rid of the 'adult' games altogether, or properly classify them and ensure they're only sold to adults. Those who are in the loop, the gamers themselves, tend to repeat the mantra 'it's all the parents' fault'.

Statistically, it's the mother who buys the little luxuries for the children. It's the mother who goes into a game shop with her excited little boy in tow, and forks out the cash for the latest title they've both seen emblazoned on billboards and blaring from their TV. So we're blaming the mothers. We can all cry "parental neglect" and get back to our Havok-engine headshots and virtual drug-running.

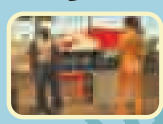
But maybe there's more to it than we thought. Maybe there's a vagueness to the whole debate, and maybe we should try to shine some light onto it. But to do this, we have to look at the issue as it really is, and not as it should be. As we all know, you can't accurately judge anything by how it looks, unless it's called *Driv3r*, of course.

The classification system is there to inform. Follow the classifications and, as a parent, you can do no wrong. Right? So why still the media uproar? Why are representatives of ELSPA answering the same questions time and time again? Why aren't parents doing the simple thing – read the box, do as you're told? The reality of the matter is that classification systems are not adhered to, and perhaps never have been. "I see these mothers buying 18-certificate games for their kids every day. I tell them the games aren't suitable, but they go ahead and buy them anyway," says Derek Millen, an ▷

Consumer awareness

games™ took to the streets to find out exactly what the mothers of Great Britain know about the mysterious black art of the videogame…

Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas



"It's the drug-dealing game, isn't it? I wouldn't let my kids near it. It's about dealing hash and stuff," said Angela, a mother of two boys aged 8 and 11. "I've played it. An old boyfriend had it. I don't think there's anything bad in it. It's just racing really, even though there's bad words and stuff," said Carol, who was out shopping with her four-year-old daughter. When we found out she had apparently played the game five years ago, we clarified the matter a little. "I didn't know there was a new one. Is it like real people in it now? Or is it still drawings?"

Silent Hill



"Oh no, she doesn't like scary games," said Patricia, who wouldn't tell us her age, but was happy to tell us about her nine-year-old daughter. "I think a game like that would give her nightmares. Psychological horror? No, she prefers Disney things." Jean, whose husband is a keen gamer, told us that he did the games-buying because she always brought home the wrong things. "That's *Resident Evil*, isn't it? I've bought the same *Resident Evil* game about five times. I think the games shops see me coming."

The Sims



"I know you can have sex in it," said Helen, whose children were at school. "I saw a few pictures of it on the internet, and people were in bed and kissing. Lesbians and gays too. So I don't think I'd want any of my kids looking at that kind of thing. My boys have a life anyway." "I play *The Sims* with my kids, so it's a good thing for us," said Yvonne, the youngest mum we spoke to. "I try to play games with my kids if I can. I think it's the modern equivalent of going out to play football with your kids or whatever."



San Andreas is far more than cursing and attitude – hence the emphasis on an 18 BBFC rating.

employee with a major games retailer. "Most parents don't care, as long as it shuts the kid up."

Is this an example of bad parenting, or merely misinformed parenting? Is there a problem with distrust of the classification system, or are parents simply expressing their right to choose what their children can or cannot play?

"When I worked in retail for a game distributor, I would warn parents whenever they would come in with their kids to buy a Mature game about the contents and why it's been rated M," says Ismini Boinodiris Roby, the co-founder of WomenGamers.com. "You wouldn't believe some of the dirty looks I'd get from their kids when I'd do this. Yet not once did a parent change their mind about buying the game after being given this information."

Why the reluctance among many parents to adhere to the classification systems that are in place? And what are the relevant organisations trying to do about it?

Can't buy, won't buy

"The systems are there and the information is there for those who want to use it," says Laurie Hall, secretary general of the Video Standards Council. "So far as parents are concerned I think they fall into three groups. There are parents who know about the systems and use them to decide what their children play; there are parents who are not, or not sufficiently, aware but who would use the systems for making purchasing decisions; lastly, there are parents who do not care what their children play. So far as the last group of parents are concerned there is not much that can be done other than banning all games other than those suitable for children, and I don't think anyone would advocate this. It is the middle group of parents where there is work to be done in terms of giving more information and embarking on public awareness campaigns."

> "I see mothers buying 18-rated games for their kids every day. Most don't care as long as it shuts the kid up"

But is it as easy as that? Isn't there another group, who may care very much what their children play, but don't place any faith in some faceless entity's advice as to what is inappropriate for their children?

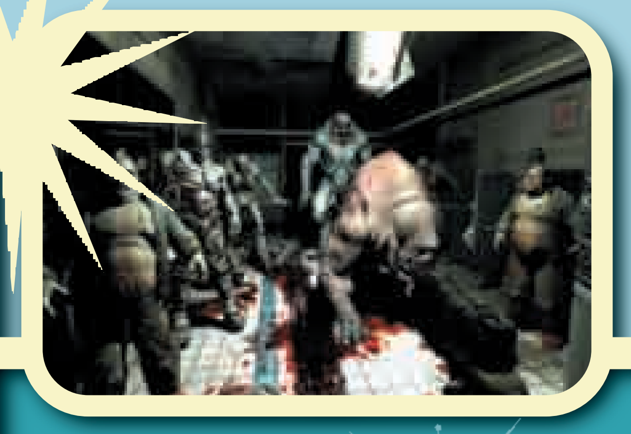
"How many kids in the States have seen an R-rated movie before turning 18? I'd dare to speculate the majority," says Roby. "So it would make sense that if parents are willing to let their kids watch R-rated movies, they would also be willing for them to play M-rated games."

The classification system seems to have failed. After all, here's a system that often leaves the public baffled as to how the board reaches its decisions. Perhaps it's too easy for a mother to disregard the ratings on the box. If a parent screens a movie and considers its 18-rating an over-reaction, then surely when the 18-rated product is 'only a game' the product should be perfectly palatable. It's only common sense, surely.

"A good horror flick can stick in my nightmares for a month, but I've yet to play a game that could give me a nightmare for one night," says Roby. "Perhaps it's not real enough for me to be psychologically thrilled like I get when I watch certain movies."

This hints at an attitude that is common among mothers, and it's an attitude that should be of most concern to responsible


The *Silent Hill* games make for more than light entertainment – some of it is plain disturbing.





The Suffering was a prime example of shocking violence for shocking violence's sake. It was lame.

gamers. A generation unfamiliar with games might find it hard to comprehend exactly what videogames are capable of depicting. This writer's own mother, told about the fact that this feature would be discussing the problems implicit in the prevalence of sexual situations in games, commented: "Two stickmen rubbing together. Big problem."

Switched on

So enough of the classifications, what about the hard realities of parental game purchasing? When it comes to videogames, does mother really know best?

"As a web designer I am familiar with technology and know that many of today's games are a hair short of looking like live action," says Tracy Gibson of the AnswerMom.com website. "I use an old Biblical method – 'avoid all appearances of evil' – when choosing games for my kids."

Avoid all appearances of evil – if it looks bad, then it's bad. But then, isn't 'bad' a relative thing? Aren't some things more bad than others? Looking at the cover of *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, you could certainly spot a few 'appearances of evil' – a drive-by, a tattooed girl with her tongue out, gambling, guns, guns, more guns… but couldn't all of this appear to the untrained eye as a simple cops and robbers game? Car chases and shooting? Surely that kind of thing's alright for the kids?

The problem with a game like *San Andreas* is that nowhere on the pack is there any suggestion of the sexual elements introduced by, for example, the Catalina character. The whole Catalina section is a part of the game that rises above the sea of bad language, cartoon violence and drug references and almost screams 'not for kids' at you.

No two children are raised the same way, and no two mothers have the same moral, ethical or religious standpoints.

The shock of the new

When someone is unfamiliar with something, when it just doesn't speak to them and never has, it's always difficult to force them to break that barrier for your own ends. It's like waving off a reluctant astronaut, and for them it's like being the first man on the Sun. It can be a liberating and painful experience.

Still, in the name of journalistic thoroughness (or plain old nosiness) we gave Maria, a Glaswegian mother of three boys, *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* and let her play some choice sections. Maria's son has completed the game, and as far as Maria was aware the game is "like an action film".

We watched, and helped a little, as Maria navigated the streets of San Andreas. The bad language didn't faze her – in fact, she laughed a little and remarked that "the acting's quite good".

Maria took her girlfriend out for a drive, and visited a fast-food place. "Yuck," was all she said as Carl and his lady made goo-goo eyes at each other over a burger. Then Maria's girlfriend asked to go on a drive-by. We gave Maria some help here, and explained that the more people she helped her girlfriend kill, the happier her girlfriend would be. Maria went a bit quiet.

When they got home, Maria was invited indoors by her girlfriend, and decided to take her girlfriend up on the kind offer. She then "made love" with her girlfriend. On the way home from the hot date, a prostitute offered Maria her services and, to our surprise, Maria decided that the night was still young. After the act was done, we gave some assistance once more. "You can kill her and get your money back," we said.

Maria promptly killed her, and took back her money.

Feeling quite proud of ourselves, we turned off the game and asked Maria how she felt about letting her son play the game. "If I'd known exactly what was in it, maybe I wouldn't have let him," she told us. "The problem is, now I want to play it."

Every mother's guide to gaming

The national press and other non-gaming news sources are keen to blow everything out of proportion – or just get it wrong. Look out for these stories that will no doubt be appearing in a tabloid near you soon...

1. 'Suitable for children' is often a matter of opinion

Those games that are recommended as suitable for children might feature elements that you, as a mother, might be unhappy with. Few parents know, for example, that the popular *FIFA* soccer franchise features occasional streaking mini-games that include full-frontal nudity.



Postal 2 – a game that offers all the violence of American life, but none of the entertainment.



Electrocuting a man for no reason other than you can – just one part of *Manhunt*'s 'appeal'.



We have to realise that while a mother might look at *San Andreas* and merely give a wry smile at the bad language and wanton destruction, she might not be at all pleased when a female character is tying her 10-year-old's avatar to a bed and whipping him for sexual gratification. It's all a question of degree.

So the 'avoid all appearances of evil' approach might not be the most effective. You simply can't get the full picture from mere appearance. But how does a mother get that full picture? Many parents like to screen whatever activities their children are involved in, to make sure they're suitable. This might mean watching a movie before they let the child watch it, reading a book before the child reads it – regardless of whether or not it's how we would raise our child, it's an example of responsible parenting. How, then, does a mother adequately screen a game that might be 20, 40 or even a hundred hours long?

"That is very difficult," says Gibson. "I would think that videogames of that length are designed for teens. If parents train teens to have some discernment they will somewhat police themselves."

Teens self-policing? If anything will raise a smile in this feature, that line will. It's likely that this magazine's readership is chock-full of people who, as teenagers, self-policed themselves straight to borrowed copies of *The Evil Dead* and to the descrambled channels on the TV, where sexy wavy lines copulated in a bed of white noise. But it's understandable that a parent might feel they have to fall back on this slight hope. Most parents of older children are still of a generation that feels unfamiliar with gaming technology. The impracticalities of screening a videogame make it all a difficult thing to grasp, an easy thing to give up and close the kids' bedroom door on.

> *"If parents won't pay heed to classifications, someone needs to pick up the slack. Why not the games companies?"*

In a perfect world, all kids would want the latest *SpongeBob Squarepants* game, but it's not a perfect world. It's a world where kids love the shock of the new, and the shock of the shocking. *GTA* might have been made for an adult audience, but just like conkers and pregnancy, it's all the rage in playgrounds.

"'No', 'no', 'no' – this is a word that parents do not use often enough. Say no, get them an appropriate game and they will get over it," says Gibson. "Kids need to learn that they cannot always have what they want and parents have good reason for not allowing things. *Grand Theft Auto* should be outlawed. A criminal training game? Unbelievable."

Okay, the 'criminal training game' comment might be a little exaggerated, a little alarmist, but at least it ensures that one child is not going to be exposed to a brilliant, but undeniably adult, game. Does it really matter how the information that a game is unsuitable reaches a mother's ears, as long as it gets into her head?

Spread the word

Back to the realities, then. The classifications are ignored. The parents are making judgement calls, but don't have the information, the technological awareness,

2. Videogames cause fatness and other ailments

While there is no scientific proof for this, there is a definite link between a young person's interest in videogames and their development into an overweight, socially retarded waster who lives their life vicariously through the lies of other losers on internet forums.

3. Learn the jargon

For a mother to grasp her child's interest in games, they must learn the correct terms. 'Noob,' for example, is an abbreviation of the term 'nubile' and is used in reference to lithe teenagers. If your child calls another child 'l33t', they must be punished, as they are suggesting that the other child is a wireframe-modelled space-trading game.

4. Wean your child off the treat

Videogames are a teat. All mothers must understand this. Children feel a need to role play steroid-munching, one-liner spitting knuckleheads in order to feel safe in a confusing world. All children should be weaned off videogames by the age of nine and onto a more challenging form of juvenile entertainment, such as *The OC*.





and certainly not the time to make these calls in any adequate manner. Shouldn't someone be helping the parents with these decisions? Can't somebody afford to?

"While I am a free-speech liberal, I think that the games industry should exercise better judgment and take more responsibility for the social and cultural effects of its products, especially since such a large percentage of the audience are kids," says Brenda Laurel, a designer and researcher whose CV includes stints with Atari, Activision and Apple. "Sadly, game companies, like any publicly traded corporations, adhere to the model where the wellbeing of people or the planet does not show up on the bottom line. I am pessimistic about the likelihood of change in this regard. Pressure from customers, investors or government regulation are the only effective curbs on corporate greed."

It all poses a question for games companies everywhere. How much would it cost to set up a simple information page detailing the kind of content that a videogame provides, so that a parent can take one look and know that they're getting the full picture? Of course, there is still the argument that it's not the responsibility of games companies to do the job the classification board is failing to do, but there is a precedent for this kind of practice – and it's from the unlikeliest of sources.

The WWE, in an effort to enhance its standing among its many detractors, set up the 'Parents' section of its website to enable viewers' parents to follow what their children were watching. The site features in-depth explanations of characters, story content and age-ratings for every WWE product available. But it also goes into more detail with certain products. For example, the site's description of *Mick Foley's Christmas Chaos*: "For children of all ages, depending on your parental outlook. The story mentions an elf who removes his clothes to 'moon' Santa, and some roughhousing among the reindeer that results in a bloody nose for Rudolph, so be forewarned." It may be tongue-in-cheek in places, but the site works, and has been successful in cleaning up the WWE's Attitude-era bad-boy reputation.

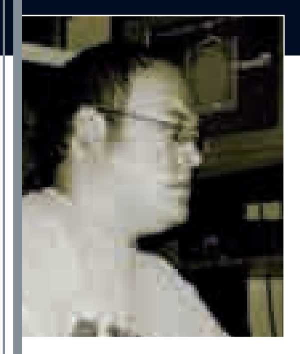
How about a page on a game's website, letting a parent in on all the mystical secrets behind that technological barrier? Or maybe some small print in a poster or advertisement, stating that the game contains violent or sexual scenes, religious references, whatever. They're small things, but a small thing is sometimes all it takes to solve a big problem. If parents aren't going to pay heed to game classifications (even in America where the classifications are often more detailed), then someone has to pick up the slack. Why not the games companies themselves? What have they got to lose? Apart from customers…

Carry on playing

At the end of the matter, we have no real answers. Children are still playing games that would shock their parents, and for most of them the experience will be entirely harmless. For some children, though, there might be a virtual moment that becomes an actual situation. And that's when the discussion is back in the hands of the more respected journalists at the *Daily Mail*. For this reason, the issue of parental guidance in gaming is something we all have to pay heed to right now.

Most of us are the NES generation, the Spectrum generation, the self-appointed first generation of videogame awareness and enlightenment. As Ismini Boinodiris Roby says, "I keep up with the industry enough to know exactly what I would be buying for my child."

But things change. Soon we might be parents, with no time to play the latest 300-hour game on the Sony HeadStation, and when told of game sex, we'll be imagining little ragdoll polygons rubbing together in a bedroom, while our kids are interacting with the kind of freaks you really should be worried about. 



The Players

WE'VE ALL STARED IN AWE AT THE SURREAL ODDWORLD TITLES. LIKEWISE, WE'VE ALWAYS WONDERED HOW MUDOKONS EVER MADE IT OUT OF SOMEONE'S HEAD AND ONTO OUR SCREENS. JAMESON DURALL KNOWS HOW…

JAMESON DURALL

ODDWORLD INHABITANTS

There's always a worry when interviewing people in the games industry that you'll hear the same old answers – the usual route into the job, the menial work in the early days, the inspiration drawn from other great games… But when you go to talk to people from Oddworld Inhabitants, the developer responsible for some of the weirdest and most memorable characters in gaming, you don't quite know what you'll find once you start picking their brains. Game designer Jameson Durall doesn't disappoint, revealing the processes behind the creation of Abe, Stranger and the Oddworld.

"I spend a lot of time reading fiction novels and watch as many movies as possible," he begins. "For instance, in preparation for working on *Stranger's Wrath* the team watched Sergio Leone westerns to get a feel for the type of environments and action we wanted to achieve. Anything that gets my brain going creatively is a good push in the right direction – even playing various board games just to see how other game mediums continue to evolve and excite the player is always fun."

Strange to think that some of the quirkiest characters ever to grace our screens could somehow have been inspired by a simple game of Mousetrap or Hungry Hungry Hippos…

Durall has been a designer for five years now, and got his first break at eMusement where he worked on an MMORPG for Square. Sadly, the project was never finished, but Durall has fond memories of that time. "I play a lot of MMORPGs now and would love to be involved in making a living world again," he says. Oddworld Inhabitants hasn't ventured into the MMORPG genre yet, with *Oddworld* titles so far being based on platforming and puzzling, though *Stranger's Wrath* has seen the series take a change in direction; thrown into a Wild West-style world, players indulge in some first-person shooting. It's a new type of game for the development team, but creating it seems to have been a hassle-free process.

"It was fairly easy for us to pull off because the humour and feel of Oddworld translates well into any many types of games," says Durall. And, predictably, Oddworld Inhabitants managed to put an original spin on what Durall admits has become an over-saturated genre. "Shooters seem to be the way to go these days," he says. "Games like *Halo 2*, *Half-Life 2* and *Mercenaries* are growing in popularity while true adventure games seem to be taking a slide. Generally, though, the shooter genre isn't changing all that much from title to title – it seems the same tried and true methods are being implemented, and are just trying to be executed better. This is making better games overall, but just not particularly innovative ones… I feel the Live Ammo system we used in *Stranger's Wrath* is truly evolutionary."

That said, while the FPS genre may be growing tired and increasingly in need of injections of inspiration, Durall says there are advantages to working within such a popular format. "The games are growing up, and the standards continue to be raised," he says. "Technology is allowing much more detailed environments and more realistic gaming experiences. These games are greatly suited for multiplayer gaming, which is drawing a huge amount of players. On top of that, the younger players want to play what the older crowd is playing. It seems these games will continue to grow in popularity in the future as well."

So now that Oddworld Inhabitants has successfully moved away from platforming and puzzling into shooting and exploring, will it stay with the FPS genre or move on further – perhaps even onto that MMORPG that Durall dreams of? No-one knows for sure right now, as Durall certainly won't give anything away. "Our part on *Stranger's Wrath* is finished now though, so after a period of catching my breath and watching for sales info, we'll begin preliminary design on our next project," he says. "But that's all the info I can give on that…"

Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath is out now on Xbox and was reviewed in issue 28.

"MANY OUTRAGEOUS IDEAS COME OUT OF OUR WORK – THE SKY IS GENERALLY THE LIMIT"
JAMESON DURALL



COMMUNITY

EVERY ISSUE, **games™** VISITS A DIFFERENT DEVELOPER. THIS MONTH, WE GO TEXAS-WAY TO SHOOT THE BREEZE WITH GEARBOX

GEARBOX

IT'S BEEN RESPONSIBLE FOR SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST LOVED CONVERSIONS, BUT SO FAR GEARBOX HASN'T DELIVERED AN ORIGINAL PRODUCT. WE CAUGHT UP WITH SOME OF THE TEAM TO TALK ABOUT WAR, CHANGE AND GROWING UP…

Chances are, you've already played and loved a Gearbox game. Despite this, the company is yet to release a single piece of original IP, but it's also one of the most respected developers in the industry. Confused? Don't be. Gearbox is the developer that has so far taken some of the most prized treasures in videogaming and brought them to a wider audience by porting them across formats. Its CV is one of the most impressive documents you're likely to read, containing *Halo*, *Half-Life*, *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*, and, er, *James Bond 007: Nightfire* for the PC. However, 2005 will change all this as Gearbox looks set to unleash *Brothers In Arms* on the gaming world, with a little help from the chaps at Ubisoft. The game follows the real-life deeds of a WWII paratrooper regiment during the period after the D-Day landings. Unlike titles such as *Medal Of Honor* and *Call Of Duty*, *Brothers In Arms* aims to be as authentic as the developer can make it.

This represents a huge gamble for Gearbox in its first solo adventure, but the team is adamant that they have done the subject justice. "If we weren't treating it with such respect from the very beginning I'd probably feel very uncomfortable with it," says producer Marc Tyler, who's also Gearbox's marketing and PR director. "But because we've made the conscious decision to treat it with respect and the fact that we want to teach people about something as well as entertain them, then I can sleep comfortably at night." It's obvious that most of the team at Gearbox have been poked and prodded by the media about the difficulties of making a game so realistic, and their answers tend to indicate that they're confident in the product. However, games are as much about commercial success as acclaim, and the developer's fledgling reputation as a generator of exciting intellectual property could be tarnished by a title that doesn't grasp the imaginations of gamers.

Gearbox's ever-exuberant CEO, Randy Pitchford, explains that there's a subtle difference about what his company is trying to do. "There's a difference between authenticity and realism; *Brothers In Arms* is an authentic game," he says. This is the fine line that *Brothers In Arms* is walking. On the one hand, a game needs something significantly different to make it stand out from every other war-themed FPS. However, if the difference is



Around 40 staff work at Gearbox's studio in Plano, Texas. That's a pretty small company for a state where everything's bigger…

"WE KNOW WHAT'S GOOD, AND WE'RE **PERFECTIONISTS** TO A FAULT SOMETIMES"

MARC TYLER, GEARBOX

nothing but everyday drudgery this is unlikely to give gamers the excitement they want. As Pitchford explains, entertainment is the top priority. "When you use the word realism you head into the realms of simulation. For example, you're in the game for eight days but you never need to go to the bathroom or eat, and this is the difference between authenticity and realism. These are the obvious ones, but you just keep taking all the bits out that aren't fun until you've made something that isn't realistic, but is authentic. We want the game to be fun."

It seems obvious that sacrifices have been made to accommodate the need to make *Brothers In Arms* an entertaining game. Tyler talks of alterations to the landscape in order to fit in with the squad command system. "Most of our level designers come from a *Half-Life* background, and to go from that sort of FPS to something more tactical, where you're not just dealing with placing enemies and you have to create something much more strategic, that is really tough." However, this in itself raised concerns about the level to which the game could be altered and still remain true enough to the events it is trying to represent. "Luckily we had Colonel Antel [WWII adviser and military historian] with us and he was able to sit down with these guys and produce a piece of paper that shows all the tactical possibilities and potential of an area," Tyler explains. "There was a lot of research and planning that went into the levels. You could argue that because the game is based on real places and events, then surely the level designer's job is made much easier, but we couldn't recreate everything down to the last hedgerow. Randy and the guys had plenty of top-down-view photographs, and at that scale it's real, but close-up we had to give the level

HALO, I LOVE YOU

Handling a prestigious game like *Halo* must have put the pressure on at Gearbox, but it did Microsoft's console-selling title proud, producing a fine PC conversion.



DIGITAL EXTREMISTS

1 MARC TYLER, PRODUCER/PR MANAGER

IN A NUTSHELL: Tyler is an old-hand in the gaming industry, joining Gearbox from Sierra Online where he handled business development and marketing for the likes of *Half-Life* and *NASCAR Racing*.

2 RANDY PITCHFORD PRESIDENT/DIRECTOR

IN A NUTSHELL: Pitchford's past lies in 3D gaming. Before founding Gearbox he designed and produced titles such as *Duke Nukem 3D* and *Shadow Warrior*. Prior to that, he was a professional magician. Cool.

WHAT'S NEW, PUSSYCAT?

Gearbox isn't afraid of change. *Brothers In Arms* has been in planning since 1999, but the team was still prepared to make major alterations in the final stretch. Marc Tyler tells of one incident in particular that totally changed the direction of the game. "The original command system in the game was very complex, and was a little like *Madden NFL* where you actually took time out and had all sorts of ways that you could move your squad mates and stuff like that," he says. "We went a long way into that, and then one day we said 'It's not going to work', so we threw it all away and went back to the drawing board. That example cost us about a month. There's plenty of times where we've done that, and we're definitely not afraid to go right back to the drawing board." However the final product turns out, it's a safe bet that the game has been through more than just the usual quality control, making it worthy of the expression 'Made by gamers, for gamers'.

designers some freedom, so they've added things like a hay bale here and there – stuff like that."

Pitchford and Tyler certainly sound confident about the project, but the fact that it's been their main occupation for the past few years could mean that it's viewed through rose-tinted glasses. However, just by looking into Gearbox's back catalogue, it's obvious that this isn't a naïve company, and is unlikely to be awed by the sight of its own creations unless the real quality is there in spades. "Gearbox is made up of 100 per cent veteran gamers and artists: everyone has been around a long time, so that makes it easier for us to take a step back and look at our work," says Tyler. "We know what's good, and we're perfectionists almost to a fault at times, so it's never really been a problem other than making us reduce stuff." Indeed, he gives a number of occasions where large sections of *Brothers In Arms* have been completely scrapped or reworked because they failed to fit in with the general ethos of the title – something less objective developers have failed to do on so many occasions. Luckily, this is something that companies such as Gearbox are able to do because they sit at the top of the pile, able to hand-pick their employees from the cream of the crop.

Pitchford is incredibly proud of the position Gearbox has found itself in, and this shows when he talks admiringly of his staff. "The in-house publishers tend to have 100-200 people devoted to projects, then you have studios like Valve and Gearbox and they're lean and mean," he says. "We don't have small numbers to survive as an independent studio; we only have the best people, and we equip the best people with the best equipment." This subject seems to cut straight to the heart of some of the problems facing the modern games industry – throw enough cash and resources at a project and it can be spat out to whatever timescale and quality is necessary. Gearbox's reputation has been founded on a variety of titles, and Pitchford's experience of making games is extremely varied. It's obvious that he holds some products in slightly higher esteem, but he's never foolish enough to think about biting the hand that feeds him when he notes, "Like when we did the *Bond* game for EA, the people at MGM had all the stuff mapped out and a schedule they wanted to keep to, so we just churned the game out. We hired a bunch of out-source people to do all the stuff we don't normally do and it was just a total work-for-hire project. The game was alright. It wasn't terrible, but it wasn't ground-breaking either – but that was what they wanted us to do."

BEING THERE

BRINGING THE PAST TO LIFE WITH COMPUTER WIZARDRY

Everything in *Brothers In Arms* is as authentic as possible, and the design team have worked from photographs and maps from the time of the D-Day landings to make sure everything looks just right.





So, was this the real reason that work began on *Brothers In Arms*? Something original to hang onto instead of being a work-horse for other developers' ideas? The answer's a resounding, er, yes and no. Pitchford and Tyler are both extremely glad to have worked on titles such as *Halo* and *Half-Life*, noting that they worked on those other projects "because they were awesome". However, there is a sense in the Gearbox camp that *Brothers In Arms* represents a step up for the company. "That's what *Brothers In Arms* is: it's Gearbox growing up, if you will," says Tyler. "It's tough to say anything about the future. If the opportunity comes we'd look into creating our own franchises that would be welcome. But we're still going to make ourselves available for importing other people's stuff from their original formats." If *Brothers In Arms* is anywhere near the success it deserves to be, it will send a strong message to the rest of the industry: Gearbox deserves your trust as a partner, but it damn well commands your respect as a competitor.

A HALF-LIFE LIVED

The *Half-Life* franchise is best-known as the domain of PC gamers, but Gearbox brought the first game to a wider audience on the PlayStation2.

SHIFTING UP A GEAR(BOX)

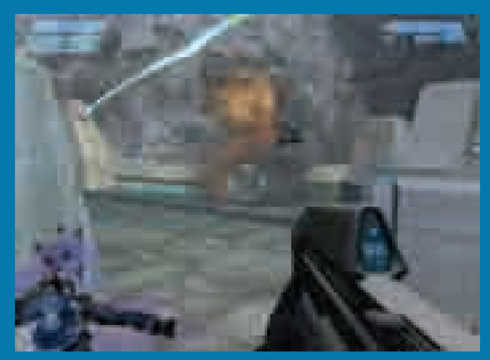
HALF-LIFE [PS2, 2001]

One of the world's best-loved PC games needed a port onto the most popular console at the time, and Gearbox was the studio for the job. There have been few complaints about its handling of Valve's baby, and this means that this can be regarded as one of its most successful early projects.



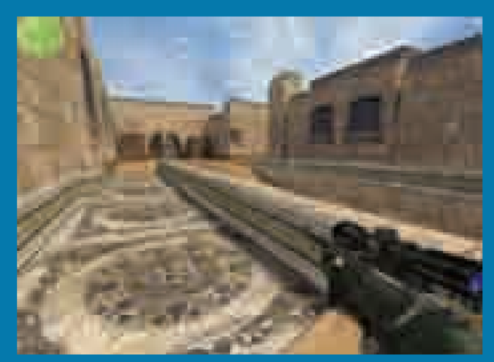
HALO [PC, 2003]

Having cut its teeth on *Half-Life*, *Tony Hawks* and *007* it was time for the real deal. Microsoft was incredibly protective of its formidable IP, so only a developer with an unparalleled reputation would be granted the task of moving it onto PC. Up stepped Gearbox, and the rest is history…



COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO [PC, 2004]

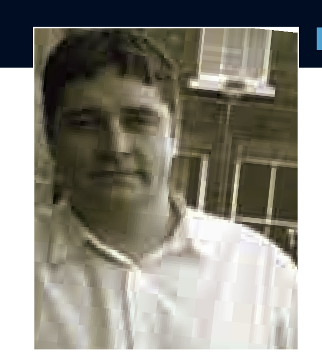
Perhaps Gearbox's most famous addition to an existing series, *Condition Zero* was the first sign that the studio wanted to get creative with its projects. The mission disc for this PC favourite was highly anticipated, but pales in comparison to *Brothers In Arms*, the team's first really independent project.





"WE'VE ACTUALLY BEEN DOING NOTHING BUT DRIVING GAMES FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS – IT'S A GOOD JOB I LIKE THEM"
RICHARD BADGER





The Players

A SECOND CHANCE IS SOMETHING MOST DEVELOPERS CAN ONLY DREAM OF, BUT IT'S A DIFFERENT STORY FOR THIS MAN. RICHARD BADGER OF JUICE GAMES REVEALS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO GET ANOTHER BITE OF THE CHERRY…

RICHARD BADGER

JUICE GAMES

We've all had a bit of bad luck every now and then; some more than others, admittedly, but we all stumble at some of life's hurdles. Unfortunately, Juice Games seems to have found every hurdle a little too high over the last few years – several of its titles have suffered publishing problems and only now, with THQ agreeing to do the honours on *Juiced*, are things starting to turn around. But, as lead designer Richard Badger recounts Juice Games' run of disappointments, it becomes clear that the challenges of the last five years have helped make the company stronger.

"I started work on *eRacer* which, while admittedly not very successful, was technically a great game, that set the foundations. We then moved towards Xbox and we did *Lamborghini*, which unfortunately never made it out due to Rage going under and EA buying all the assets. That was a terrible time for us; we were devastated. *Lamborghini* was a great game – it looked as if it was going to receive good scores from the press and it would have been one of the first Live racing titles. Even when EA bought it and we knew full well that we would never see any money, that's something that you can swallow; when you find out that it's never going to be released full stop, well, that's a real kick in the teeth. We threw our heart and soul into the game for 18 months. I suppose ultimately the whole experience has strengthened our resolve."

This has obviously been the case as Juice Games has simply refused to give up on *Juiced*. When publisher Acclaim went under last year it looked like the game, which was ready to go into shops, would never get released. Thanks to the intervention of THQ, the game will now hit the shelves, though the arrival of a new publisher has meant a few changes for Badger and his colleagues.

"The challenges are to build up a good relationship," he says. "When you go to a new publisher you have to deal with a whole new set of guys. There are a lot of differences. They have to get in with your working practices and we have to make sure that we can meet their demands and understand what it is they want from us. These things are sorted out very quickly, though, and at the end of the day we all want to make a good game. Working with THQ is really a godsend for us, it couldn't have worked out better."

'Godsend' is almost definitely the right word – thanks to this move to THQ, Juice Games has received a rare second chance for its game. *Juiced* has already been released for review once and many publications have already commented on the game's strengths and weaknesses. It's rare that a developer gets an extra four months to amend its game after hearing feedback from the gaming press.

"It was an incredible opportunity," Badger admits. "But initially it was a very tough to go back to the game. We thought our work on it was finished and then THQ picked it up and told us to start working on it again. This was a huge mindset change for us, as we were already working on another title." The Juiced team also had to deal with the negative comments certain aspects of the game attracted in reviews and previews, though as with almost everything else to do with this title, it's all come good in the end.

"We have to admit that when we first received the reviews, spread them all out in front of us and saw the negative feedback in some magazines our initial reaction was that it was all a load of rubbish and they were wrong," says Badger. "Though after we'd been away for a while and come back to it, it was obvious that there were fundamental mistakes. There were AI problems and some of the cars were just impossible to drive; the handling was awful and our way around this problem was just to not drive these cars at all – a bit stupid when we look back on it now. It was all down to the pressure we were under by Acclaim to deliver by the deadline. Thankfully, we've addressed all of these problems now and the whole thing flows much better. We're very pleased with it now. It'll be interesting to see what the press make of it this time…"

Juiced is out in May on PC, PS2 and Xbox and was previewed in issue 22.



REVIEWS



Grab your +5 Modem of Connectivity and prepare to visit Azeroth as Blizzard reveals its first massively multiplayer online role-playing game. And it's a corker.

World Of Warcraft 102

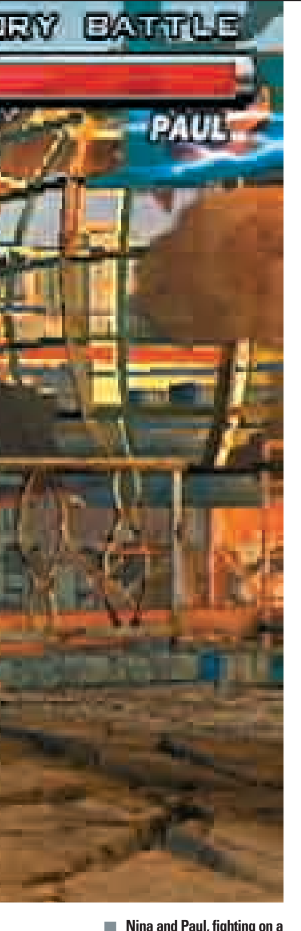
THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, games™ is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like – we only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad we'll make sure you know, if it's great we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.

Jinpachi, *Tekken 5*s final boss, is as cheap as they come – unblockable stun attacks, long-range fireballs and ridiculous damage to boot. Swine.

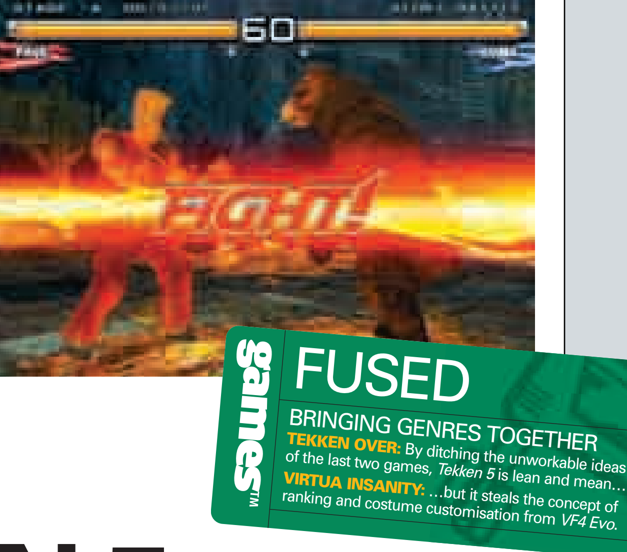


Even the new characters are familiar – Asuka plays like Jun from *Tekken 2*, while Raven is a dead ringer for Hayabusa from *Dead Or Alive*.



Nina and Paul, fighting on a skyscraper… haven't we seen this somewhere before?





TEKKEN 5

THREE STEPS BACK, ONE GIANT STEP FORWARD

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMAT
Arcade

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Namco

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
$59.99

RELEASE
June '05
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

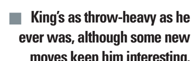
The traditional gift for a tenth anniversary is tin – how appropriate for marking this first decade of the Iron Fist tournament. Of course, Namco would rather celebrate by quietly reminding you that it's been ten years since "the first *Tekken* redefined the console fighting scene" (Namco's words, not ours). We disagree; we prefer to leave that honour to the *Soul Blade*s and *Virtua Fighter 2*s of our time. In fact, we'd even go so far as to say that out of the whole *Tekken* franchise, only the third instalment is really worth playing – *Tekken 2* was good, yes, but was a mere precursor for the main event that was *Tekken 3*. That makes Namco two for five in our books… not exactly the most promising of records.

Despite such a catalogue of disappointment, though, it was hard not to have high hopes for *Tekken 5* before our import copy arrived – just as we did for *Tekken 4*, and *Tekken Tag Tournament* before that. The resounding success of the arcade version had already gone a long way to bolstering such hopes, if only because arcade gamers are so damn picky when it comes to their fighters – a good sign that the PlayStation2 would wash the awful taste of *Death By Degrees* from our mouths. So, letterboxes clattered, PS2s were powered up, rendered introductions were hastily skipped through. And the verdict? We're amazed. Not so much at the game (although that in itself has impressed us), but at how much humble pie must have been eaten at Namco in order to get the game to where it is now. Or rather, back to where it was.

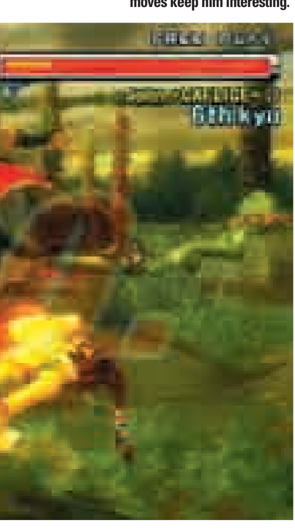
"THE NEWLY CREATED GAME ENGINE DOES A PHENOMENAL JOB OF GENERATING SOLID, BELIEVABLE CHARACTERS AND ARENAS"

It's rare that developers ever admit mistakes with videogames, choosing instead to try and turn unworkable ideas into something functional for the next title down the line (and usually messing things up even more). However, the fact that *Tekken 5* takes the innovations – and by innovations, we mean heinous errors – made by both *Tekken 4* and *Tag Tournament* and pretty much throws them out completely shows a touch of courage and a whole lot of smarts on the part of Namco. This isn't 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it'; this is Namco coining the phrase 'If it wasn't broke and then we ruined it, we'd better put it back together before anyone notices'. More importantly, though, it's proof that *Tekken* can rank up there with the best that the 3D beat-'em-genre has to offer when it tries, despite the series' more recent offerings.

This isn't to say that *Tekken 5* makes any more sense than any of the previous games, of ▷



King's as throw-heavy as he ever was, although some new moves keep him interesting.







TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

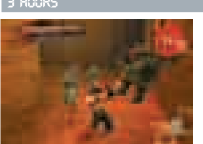
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

3 MINS



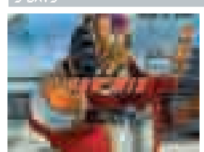
Straight into the Story mode you'll go, if only because you want to unlock all those hidden fighters. Easy mode, one round – it's the same as always. Thanks, Namco.

3 HOURS



Unlocking Devil Jin means you have to play Devil Within – three hours of our lives we wish we could have back. Still, once you've done it, you never have to play it again.

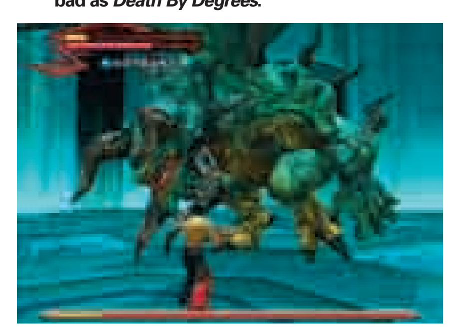
3 DAYS



It's all about the ranking now – ploughing your way through Arcade mode is tough, but ultimately worth it if you want to refine your skills. And you will want to.

BETTER THE DEVIL?

Why Namco insisted on including Devil Within, a free-roaming 3D beat-'em-up mode featuring Jin as the lead character, is beyond us. Putting five stages of repetitive combat, the same three enemies (despite the different skin types), some incredibly rudimentary puzzles and a selection of annoying boss battles between you and the unlocking of Devil Jin really doesn't make any sense, especially since you'll never want to play this mode again after reaching the end (despite the potential for large sums of gold in return). We're actually inclined to ask Namco to return the three hours of our lives that it took to play through it… but at least it's nowhere as bad as *Death By Degrees*.



All the bosses in Devil Within are rubbish, but True Ogre's final form is the worst – you can beat him by using the same move over and over.

course. Once again, the mostly ridiculous storylines (from Paul's desperate need to become the best fighter in the universe and Jin's battle with the Devil gene, right up to Heihachi's obvious death in the intro movie and then unexplained resurrection in the penultimate battle) give Namco the excuse to slot in plenty of attractive rendered sequences around the action. The action, however, is clearly where all the care and attention has been lavished rather than the frivolities surrounding it. The newly created engine, for instance, does a phenomenal job of generating solid, believable characters and arenas for the PS2, although the fact we say 'for the PS2' is telling; unfortunately, it's still not close to matching something like *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* for visual quality.

As if to compensate for this, *Tekken 5* offers a pace of combat that competes with Tecmo's revamped Xbox creation on every level. Placing itself as far away from the methodical and strategic pace of *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution* as you could get without becoming unplayable, bouts in *Tekken 5* are lightning-fast affairs where one wrong button press can lead to you having your face repeatedly slammed into the incredibly weak concrete underfoot. Yes, so for those averse to mastering the moves properly there's more button-bashing available than there probably should be, particularly if you're of the Christie Montero/Eddy Gordo persuasion (in which case, you deserve every kicking you get at the hands of a more skilled player). However, the game's return to the fundamentals of blocking, countering and simple evasion as opposed to the unnecessary abuse of 3D movement and stilted enclosed environments of the last two games helps reintroduce the skill element for those willing to learn.

"ADMITTING ITS MISTAKES WAS ONE THING, BUT DOING SOMETHING ABOUT THEM WAS EXACTLY WHAT NAMCO NEEDED TO DO WITH TEKKEN"

And it's this huge step back from the 'progress' that the series has previously made that really makes the game what it is. That *Tekken 5* plays a whole lot like *Tekken 3* is to the developer's credit, because Namco clearly realised that something needed to be done in order to get the fans back on side. Naturally, some aspects remain, albeit in a tweaked form – many of the different areas you can fight in are enclosed, although their sizes have been expanded so that bouts don't just degenerate into who can pin their opponent against the wall first – but, generally, it's as if the series has gone back in time eight years. Whether you see that as a bad thing is, again, a matter of opinion, but given the choice between a graphically attractive game that plays much like something that previously gave us huge amounts of pleasure or one that's completely unbalanced and full of annoying flaws, we know which we'd prefer.

But it's not all perfect. As always, Namco appears to have misjudged some of the most

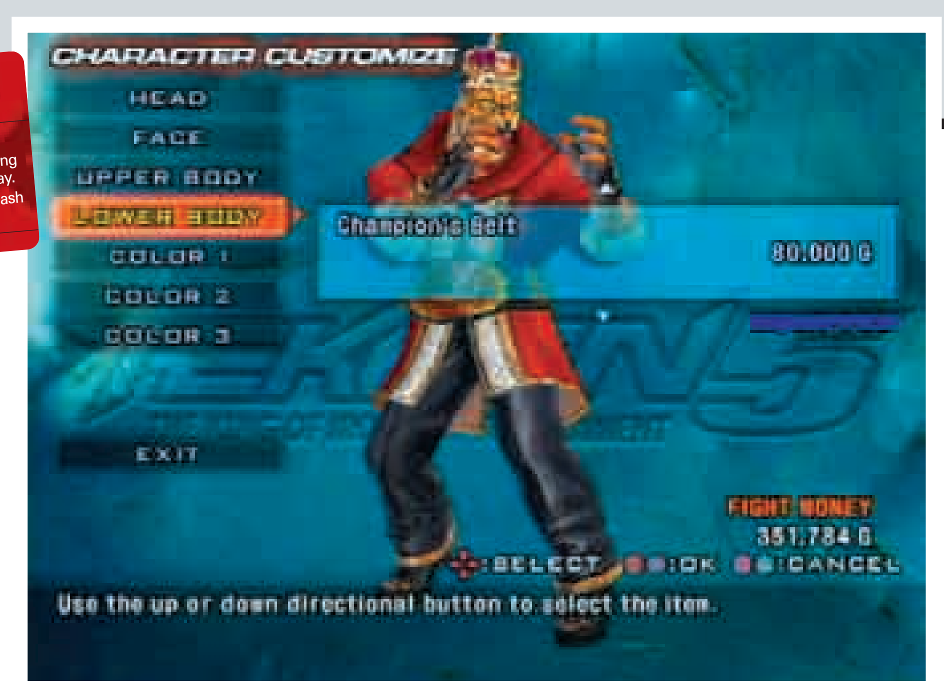
ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

5+3: Going back to the style of *Tekken 3* but adding new concepts has done wonders for the gameplay.
WIDE OPEN SPACE: Although you can still smash your opponent into walls, the arenas are bigger.

FIX UP, LOOK SHARP

Naughty naughty… someone's been reading over Sega's shoulder, haven't they? With more than a nod to *Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution*, *Tekken 5* also now features its very own Customisation mode. Gold earned in other parts of the game (primarily Arcade mode, although Devil Within and Story Battle also reward you) can be used to change the appearance of your ranked characters. Though purely cosmetic, these tweaks can also be pretty comical as many of the items available are pointlessly silly (King's jewelled crown, championship belt and ruffled collar being our favourites), although new items become available the more you play the various modes





The delights of a one-on-one girl fight never pale, and now everything looks glorious too.



Paul's back on form since being ruined for *Tekken 4*, although he's been powered down slightly to compensate.

obvious ideas while being distracted by the finer details. This year's über-boss, for instance, Heihachi's father Jinpachi, is a ridiculously overpowered creation with enough cheap moves and annoying tactics to make you curse, shout and then curse some more, particularly when you lose to him for the tenth time in a row because of his absurd stun punch/long-range fireball combo. The revised Tekken Force mode, now appearing under the heading Devil Within, is also incredibly mundane and repetitive; a fact that's compounded further by it being the only method of unlocking the final character in the game, Devil Jin. Even the inclusion of the Arcade History section (containing the first three *Tekken* titles and an unlockable version of *Starblade*), while a nice idea on paper, seems a bit of a strange choice simply because only *Tekken 3* is worth that trip down memory lane… and even then, that'll make you realise just how much it has in common with *Tekken 5*.

Thank goodness, then, that beat-'em-ups are mostly about the competition rather than the extras. Once you split your time between improving the ranks of your favourite fighters in Arcade mode – pitting your skills against genuine AI data from *Tekken* players the world over, no less – and playing against your friends, the game's qualities start to shine through, with the capable AI and rock-solid collision models working together wonderfully. True, the lack of an online mode may cause some PS2 owners to gripe but, realistically, it just wouldn't work for such a fast-paced fighter (something that some owners of *DOA Ultimate* will no doubt confirm). Instead of complaining, the focus should on Namco managing to do something right with one of its biggest franchises after such a long run of unpleasantness; admitting its mistakes is one thing, but doing something about them is exactly what the developer needed to do with the *Tekken* brand to win back some respect.



VERDICT 8/10
THE FIRST DECENT TEKKEN GAME SINCE THE PSONE

FAQs

Q. BLEUGH – TEKKEN!
Don't be so hasty. The last two might have been terrible, but *Tekken 5* is a solid and speedy fighter worthy of your attention.

Q. WHY?
Because Namco has modelled this fifth instalment on *Tekken 3* – the high point of the series – and then made improvements accordingly.

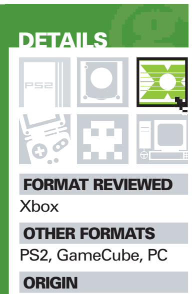
Q. ONLINE?
Unfortunately not. But then, as *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* has proved, playing such fast-paced combat online is an incredibly hit and miss affair anyway.

You can expect to see sights that put the previous games to shame. That's progress for you.

"IS THIS A COMBAT KNIFE I SEE BEFORE ME?"

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
France

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
GameLoft

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
1 April '05

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-4 Online)

The more you think about the stealth genre, the less sense it makes. It's amazing to think that some brave developer one day decided to say to a table full of suits, "I've got a cracking idea, lads. Let's create a game where the whole point is to avoid as much action as you can. You know, where the player has to sit in the dark, crawl at a ludicrously slow pace and ensure that they miss out on all the firefights and fisticuffs that our big book of figures says they like so much. It'll be awesome." The poor chap must have been laughed out the room, guffawed down the corridor and then sniggered at until his desk was clear and he was standing in the car park holding a box.

Of course, we now know that stealth is a goldmine. There's a huge number of gamers who can't get enough of hiding in lockers, sneaking up on guards and finding innovative ways of foiling the increasing number of security cameras the videogame world seems to be sprouting. And as if this needed to be proved, the *Splinter Cell* series' latest title is looking as good as ever and is likely to continue the success of the genre – for now.

For the most part, short of some natty visuals, there's little that sets *Chaos Theory* apart from

games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CALL ME MACK: Sam's new knife creates more options than ever before.

LOCATION, LOCATION: Environments look better than ever; the lighting has never been so convincing.



It's not all dark corridors and heating ducts. Get some fresh air while you're avoiding detection.

FAQs

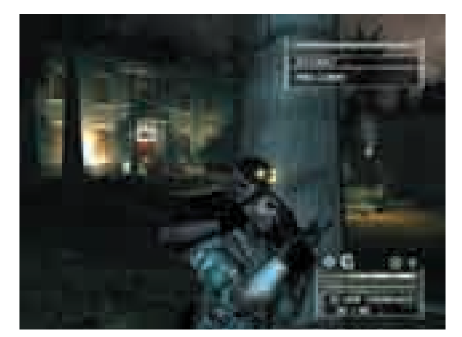
Q. AS DIFFICULT AS THE LAST GAME?
The new abilities probably make it that little bit easier.

Q. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE?
Chaos Theory requires a lot of patience so you're in for quite a trek.

Q. WHAT ABOUT REPLAYABILITY?
You could always see if you can manage it with zero casualties.



As usual, awareness of your surroundings will be crucial – and there's a lot to watch with all the detail that's been put in.



Taking hostages has never looked so real. Quite disturbing, actually.



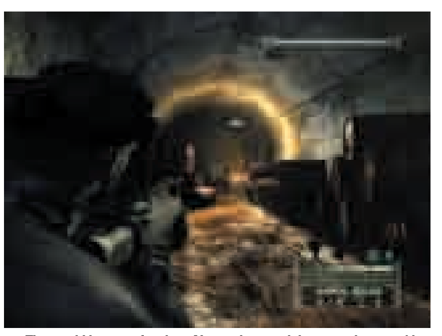
Where would Sam be without night vision, eh? In the dark, mostly.

its forerunners. It's essentially the same game with a few bells and whistles attached in an attempt to keep the experience fresh. The most noticeable of these differences is the fact Sam has a new toy. Nothing particularly splendorous – it's a knife – but in a game that relies on silent kills and stealthy entrances you couldn't ask for a more useful item. This blade has been implemented well, with many of the chances for use being optional but ultimately worthwhile if you spot the opportunities. The majority of these involve slicing through netting or the rear of a tent to get the drop on an enemy, but breaking open locks when you don't have the time to mess around picking them and, of course, stabbing people in the gut are some of the knife's more unsubtle uses; you'll find that it becomes an increasingly important tool.

Another feature that's bound to receive a lot of attention is the new co-op multiplayer mode. As well as the multiplayer options that were available in *Pandora Tomorrow* – which have been improved with level-specific goals to make for more interesting matches – you'll be able to team up with another spy over Live or split-screen and take on a separate selection of missions that are designed perfectly for two. You and your partner will have a whole new set of moves, including leg-ups, throws and even a *Mission Impossible*-esque manoeuvre that sees you lower your partner down on a rope to hack computers. It's this mode that really shows you why *Splinter Cell* is the genre champion. The ingenious co-op level layouts remind you why we all fell for the series in the first place, and although the main single-player campaign might be just as we expected, this mode shines through as a key reason to get this game.



Team up with a mate to solve problems. You keep your buddy suspended above the floor while he hacks the computer. Good work.



That could be some faceless AI grunt in your sights, or perhaps you'd rather take down a mate in multiplayer?

With the downloadable maps that are bound to make an appearance for Live users in the future, we imagine that both this and the improved Versus mode are going to get plenty of play.

It's safe to say that you won't be disappointed with *Chaos Theory*. Enjoyable, challenging… in fact, you probably knew what you'd be getting long before you read this review. The series has always delivered quality and *Chaos Theory* is no exception, but a fancy facelift and a couple of new moves every year won't be considered adequate improvements for much longer. Despite the inclusion of new gadgets and stunning visuals, the series is starting to decompose; playing the same thing over and over is beginning to wear a little thin. It's a good job the multiplayer experience continues to blossom.

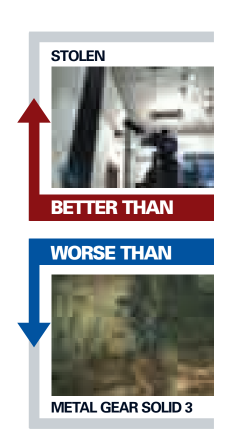


VERDICT 8/10

WE DEFINITELY SAW THIS ONE COMING

SPIES LIKE US?

Variety is the spice of life, don't you know, and GameLoft is a developer that realises this. *Chaos Theory* will present you with more options than ever before regarding how you complete your missions. As well as the usual multi-routed stages that have been found in all the previous Sam Fisher titles, many situations have multiple solutions. You can search round a building all day looking for a computer that has the code you're looking for, but you now have the option of hacking it open. Hacking takes the form of a number-matching mini-game, and while much quicker than a hunt if you know what you're doing, it will leave you extremely vulnerable and will trigger an alarm if messed up. It's all down to what kind of spy you want to be.







DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
4 April '05

PLAYERS
1-4

STAR FOX: ASSAULT

I WISH I COULD FLY, RIGHT UP TO THE SKY…

Despite the constant debate regarding the quality of the title, the third-person antics of *Star Fox Adventures* marked an interesting change in direction for the great *Star Fox* series. Shunning the tried-and-tested formula of the first two games and drifting into the adventure game genre was a good move, and the involvement of Rare ensured it was a treat for the eyes. Nevertheless, the promised return to the series' roots in *Star Fox: Assault* managed to pique our interest.

It's an easy picture to paint: the same Arwing action levels that featured in *Star Wing* and *Star Fox 64* with all the graphical enhancements that the GameCube can muster thrown into the mix to create a title as great as its predecessors. Simple. As it goes, this is exactly what you'll see. The Arwing levels are present, correct and have been presented in a way that pleases us greatly. These stages play superbly and look even better, we can't argue with that. However, out of the ten stages that are on offer only three of them actually take this form, with the rest of them wasted on tedious land-based levels. It's disappointing – the equivalent of receiving a box of shortbread from a relative at Christmas.

These surface stages essentially ruin what could have been a very enjoyable game; they just feel wrong. The movement feels unnatural no matter how you set up the controls and the levels themselves are monotonous affairs with every single one of them requiring you to track down and destroy a large amount of generators/radar jammers/hatchers while you watch the skies longingly, wishing you were up there with the rest of the gang having fun. The others in your team



ALL CHANGE

One of the first things you'll notice when you start playing is the change in line-up. Peppy is now officially too old for this flying malarkey and spends his time researching, whining about things and eating biscuits from the comfort of his desk back on the Great Fox. Obviously this leaves a gaping hole in the Star Fox team's formation, so taking his place is the over-sensitive Krystal, who despite previously only being capable of piloting prehistoric birds can now fly an Arwing with the best of them. And it's not only the good guys who have been recruiting. The womanising Panther is now an official member of Star Wolf and poor old Pigma has been booted out due to misconduct and being generally rubbish. It really is a dog-eat-dog universe out there.

The Landmaster is back in all its hovering glory. It's tough to control, though.





ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

AIR TIME: Flying through space has never looked so good. Shame about some of the planet levels.

ALL TOGETHER NOW: The multiplayer options are far better than any of the previous titles.

It's nice to see Namco has spent time making the dinosaur planet from *Star Fox Adventures* look not as good.

also seem to be in on the joke and will complain constantly in your ear about the enemy-filled airspace and how tough their exciting dogfights are, while you're charged with some inane task that – if Fox was any sort of leader – pompous flyboy Falco would be sent to do.

Worse still, Fox has really let himself go. With Rare off the case the impressive fur that coated his body in *Star Fox Adventures* has completely vanished and – in everything apart from cut-scenes – our main character now looks like he's constructed of very un-fluffy orange and white cardboard. This lack of detail has also stretched onto the planet landscapes, with most of them being bare and bland – astonishing considering the impressiveness of the space levels. While it could be argued that these levels are the main focus of the game and as such deserve to look better, the fact that they're outnumbered three-to-one by the shoddy missions suggests that Namco may have got its priorities wrong.

As negative as this all may sound, *Star Fox: Assault* has its good points and many will defend it against the slamming it's likely to receive. Although the multi-routed map level layout – again something we were hoping for – doesn't feature, enough challenge has been added to make sure that you'll be kept busy should you wish to see everything the title has to offer. Hidden flags are scattered about each level for you to track down, medals can be earned, there's a version of *Xevious* waiting to be unlocked for those who have the necessary skills, and the multiplayer options are superior to the series' previous offerings, providing good maps to play on and a choice of vehicles to take into the battles.

It could be argued that *Star Fox: Assault* only seems as bad as it does because we were expecting so much more and were looking forward to some classic Fox McCloud action, but the more you play, the more it becomes obvious that this is more than a case of shattered hopes. There are some serious issues concerning gameplay and enjoyment that leave this latest *Star Fox* game a fair way short of its predecessors. Maybe next time…

FAQs

Q. IS ANDROSS BACK?
Surprisingly not. Guess he had to give up some time.

Q. SO ONLY THREE ARWING LEVELS?
Unfortunately so.

Q. ISN'T THAT JUST SILLY?
Yes. We know.



Why oh why was the whole game not like this?

ROGUE SQUADRON III



BETTER THAN

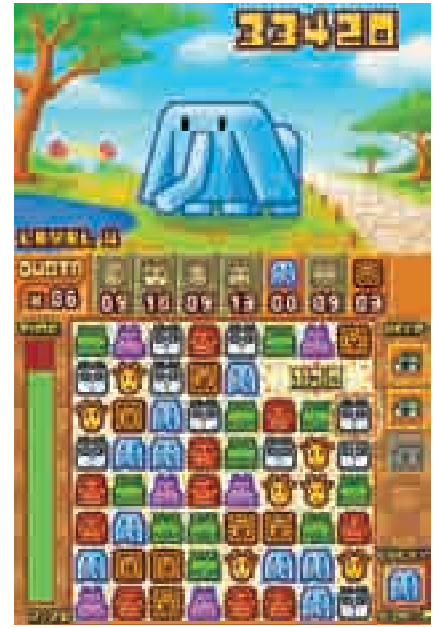
WORSE THAN

STAR FOX 64

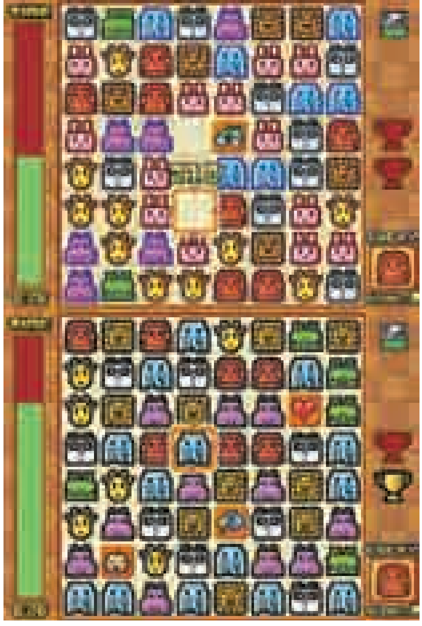


VERDICT 4/10
AN ASSAULT ON A FINE SERIES

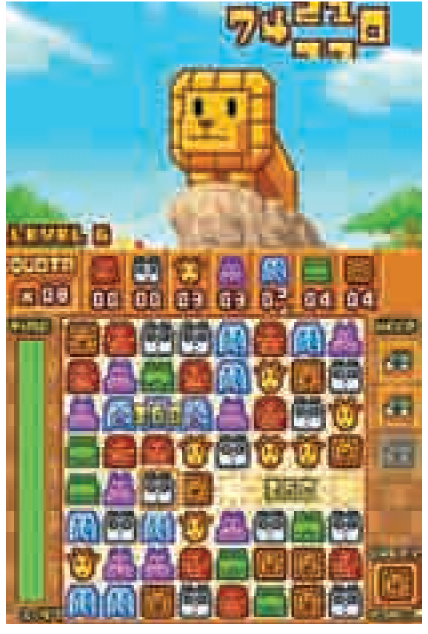

eMag



The top screen isn't used for much besides displaying the current tallies for your animals and showing some amusing reactions.



Multiplayer action is incredibly fast and frantic, with success for one player swiftly reducing the time limit available for the other.



In the single-player modes, the only power-up available is a pair of Binoculars that points out all the available moves in one fell swoop.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Ignition Entertainment

DEVELOPER
Buddiez Inc

PRICE
£19.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

ZOO KEEPER

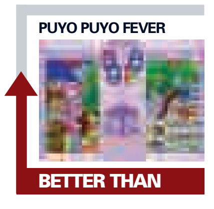
THE ANIMALS CAME IN THREE BY THREE, HURRAH HURRAH

Why *Zoo Keeper* hasn't been conceived as a handheld title before now is somewhat astounding. Having enjoyed far-reaching success as an arcade game in Japan and a Flash game on the internet, this beautifully simple game is ideally suited to the portable medium. Whether that, combined with its status as a pure and simple puzzle title, makes it to the DS what *Tetris* was to the original Game Boy is open to debate, although the sly graphical reference on the title screen (namely the Russian-style towers that form part of the zoo's entrance) suggests the developer believes it is.

Whatever the case, *Zoo Keeper* couldn't be better suited to the DS, whether it's in terms of simplicity, longevity or just sheer mechanics (again, just as *Tetris* was to the Game Boy). It only takes a few moments to learn the game's concept – moving animal icons around a grid to create matching lines of three or more of the same creature – but, as with *Tetris*, it takes a while to master the nuances, as creating your own chain combos by moving animals in quick succession is the key to the top of the score table. Thankfully, the use of the DS's touch screen speeds up the process, with a few flicks of the stylus being all it takes to move animals around like a pro.

The main, 20-level Zoo Keeper mode aside, the inclusion of additional modes expands the game's lifespan even further. Tokoton mode, for example, twists the main mode's concept of collecting a set number of animals before levelling up by increasing that number to 100 (letting you rack up some stupidly high scores), while Quest mode – ten stages requiring set achievements, rewarding success with points – and Time Attack only serve to emphasise the game's focus on score improvement and refinement of your skills.

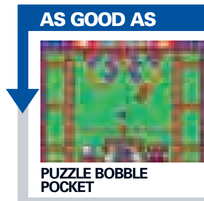
The criticism that the game is available on the internet for free is as irrelevant as it is idiotic – the convenience of being able to play it anywhere (as opposed to sitting in front of a monitor), not to mention the improvements made through the touch controls and additional gameplay elements, more than make it worthy of the already low price. As simple and addictive a puzzle title as we've seen in recent years, *Zoo Keeper*'s transition onto a handheld platform like the DS couldn't have been more of a success. *Tetris* for the next generation? It's certainly a close call.



PUYO PUYO FEVER

BETTER THAN

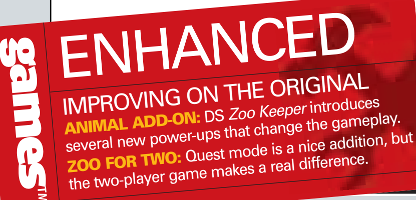
AS GOOD AS



PUZZLE BOBBLE POCKET

VERDICT 8/10

THE BETTER YOU GET, THE MORE ADDICTIVE IT BECOMES



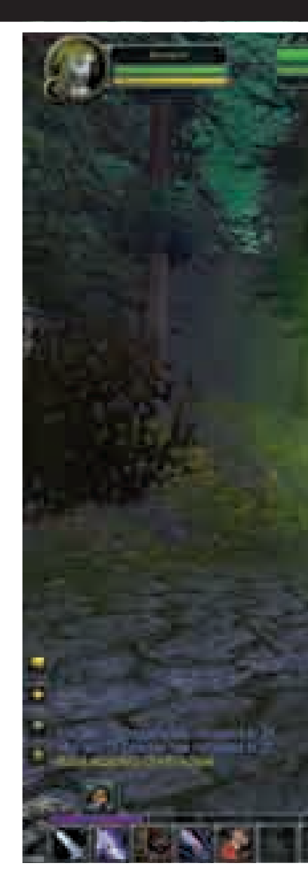
games

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

ANIMAL ADD-ON: DS *Zoo Keeper* introduces several new power-ups that change the gameplay.

ZOO FOR TWO: Quest mode is a nice addition, but the two-player game makes a real difference.



DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi Universal

DEVELOPER
Blizzard Entertainment

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
Massively Multiplayer

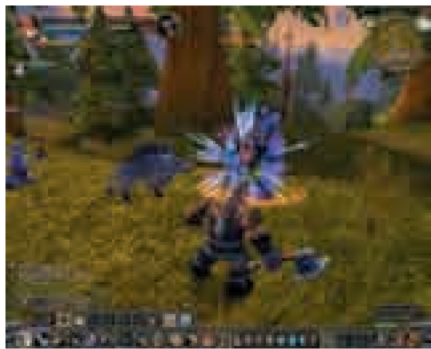
MINIMUM SPEC
800Mhz processor, 256Mb RAM, 32Mb DirectX 9-compatible graphics card, 4Gb hard disk space, 56k internet connection



WORLD OF WARCRAFT

IT ISN'T SHORTENED TO 'WOW' FOR NOTHING







At the time of writing, *World Of Warcraft* has already sold over a million copies, 400,000 of those in Europe alone – a resounding success by anyone's standards. Of course, that the game has outstripped all expectations could have been predicted by even the most inept forecasters, thanks mainly to a combination of Blizzard's heritage and the popularity of the *Warcraft* brand. However, while the game's success was guaranteed, we never expected *WoW* (an official abbreviation, it seems) to be as good as it is.

That's not to say it's perfect but, as a first attempt by a developer with no experience with massively multiplayer online RPGs, it's a damn sight more accomplished than some games created by those who supposedly know what they're doing with the genre. What *WoW* is not, however, is an MMORPG revolution – we've already heard people say it is, even though the game doesn't do all that much to introduce new and exciting ideas to the genre. But that's not a problem, especially since *WoW* manages to carve its own niche between the likes of *EverQuest II* and *City Of Heroes* by having the best of both titles; the ridiculously huge world and extensive abilities, trades and item lists of the former, combined with the accessibility and visual flair of the latter.

This isn't a game that's going to get everyone into MMORPGs, but it is one that breaks down many of the barriers that stop the genre being fun. For example, against *EverQuest II*'s faux-realistic fantasy world that clearly takes itself too seriously, *WoW*'s oh-so-subtle cartoon leanings manage to recreate the world of Azeroth exactly as we would have imagined from playing previous *Warcraft*



The depth of *EverQuest II* with the light touch of *City Of Heroes*. Awesome combination…



SKINNER, TAILOR, HEALER, COOK

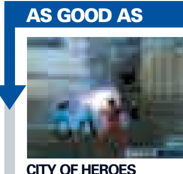
While quests make up the meat of progressing in *WoW*, there's also the less adventurous side of your character's talents to consider. Nine primary professions are on offer for you to dabble in, from Herbalism and Leatherwork to Mining, Engineering and Alchemy. However, the fact you can only pick two and can't change your mind once you've chosen makes the decision a little trickier. Once you've decided, though, it's quite possible to lose hours or even days just making bandages, skinning animals, building weapons and discovering weird and wonderful cookery recipes instead of actually doing quests. That said, considering the income potential that many of the professions offer, that might not be such a waste of time after all.

EVERQUEST II



BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



CITY OF HEROES





■ There's a great variety in the landscape, from rolling hills and icy mountains to scorching deserts and fetid swamps.

■ Death can be a real pain in the neck when you're on a quest, so teaming up with someone who can revive you is a good idea.

games; vibrant with life and detail without going so far as to make it unbelievable, just as *City Of Heroes* did. By contrast, MMORPG players who found *City Of Heroes* too basic for their tastes (thanks to a lack of anything to do outside the main quest-based action) will revel in the depth offered by *WoW*'s multiple professions and peripheral elements, without ever feeling out of their depth.

But the key element of *WoW*'s success is something that probably comes from Blizzard's years of creating everything except MMORPGs: accessibility. *City Of Heroes* had a similar quality but much of it was achieved by the simplification of the MMORPG style – not a bad thing by any means, but enough to have more experienced players accusing it of 'dumbing down'. *WoW* doesn't do that. Instead, it offers all the things you'd expect from an MMORPG (from basic quests and trading to guilds, raids and secondary professions) but on a slow progression, allowing you to understand and refine your skills in one area before another is introduced. Players learn the basics of combat and questing to begin with, moving on to acquire Talents and other class-specific abilities at level ten, and then full-on Professions once they explore beyond their starting area. How quickly this happens is up to you, of course – while some will want to go exploring as soon as possible (no doubt winding up on the business end of a ferocious creature after being so hasty), each region of the *WoW* universe offers enough scope for players to linger for hours, days or even weeks.

Admittedly, there are flaws. Many of these are the kind that will annoy experienced MMORPG players and hold up novices, but they merely smack of Blizzard not having found its feet with the genre rather than being anything serious. Having to queue behind other players while quest-specific enemies respawn, being told your inventory is full when trying to claim an item at the end of a collecting quest (despite the fact that the items you've collected will disappear once the quest is over), even the fact that there's nowhere near as much emphasis on teamwork as you might expect… these are all things that, while relatively easy to fix, can't really be overlooked in the scope of a review.

But with *WoW* only a few months into its potentially extensive lifespan (and taking into account the number of things that the game gets right), such kinks are but a single fly in a vat of silky smooth ointment. Blizzard has its reputation for a reason; and if this is only the beginning of what this newly imagined version of Azeroth has to offer, we can see ourselves living there for a very long time.

gamesTM

FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

WAR... HUH!: Everything you could have hoped for from the *Warcraft* universe is in this game.

SOMETHING NEW: For a first attempt at an MMORPG, *WoW* is pretty damn impressive.

VERDICT 9/10

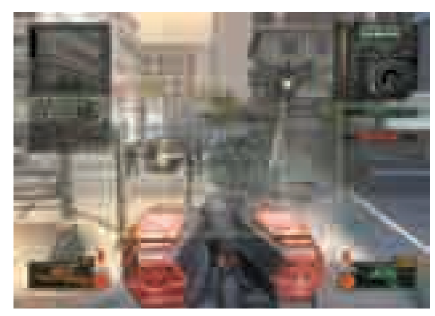
A FANTASTIC FOUNDATION FOR BLIZZARD TO BUILD UPON

FAQs

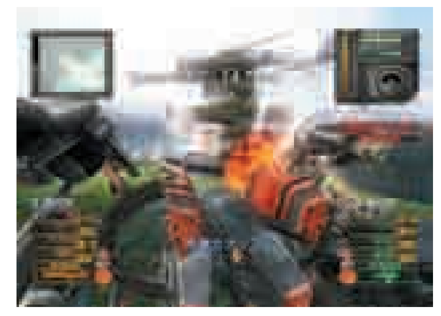
Q. OPENING OPTIONS?
Quite a few, actually. Two sides (Horde and Alliance, with four races each) and nine unique professions allow quite a range of combinations.

Q. THEN WHAT?
Up to you. Who you are determines where you begin, but once you start levelling up you can go pretty much anywhere.

Q. THE USUAL?
Pretty much, although it's done with plenty of style. New skills and abilities open up as you progress and the world is genuinely huge.



While gunfire is fine for taking down hordes of troops, tanks require something with a bit more kick.



When you're under attack from helicopters and gun towers, stopping to change weapons is often a mistake.



Sometimes when shooting and stamping on soldiers, trees and other inanimate objects get in the way.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

AMERICA, FK YEAH!:** You take control of a president who isn't scared of military service.

YOUR OWN WMDS: Use collected money to invest in the development of new weaponry.

METAL WOLF CHAOS

MEET A PRESIDENT WHO FIGHTS HIS OWN BATTLES… IN A MECH SUIT

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
From Software

DEVELOPER
From Software

PRICE
¥6,800

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

Occasionally, work colleagues will fall out – it's only natural when people work together eight hours a day, five days a week. But however nasty workplace spats get, they're unlikely to top the robot-fuelled bitchiness of *Metal Wolf Chaos*. Considerably displeased with the US president, vice president Richard Hawk has taken it upon himself to oust his boss by turning the entire country against him. You begin the game as the blighted president, immediately confronted by waves of soldiers all instructed to kill you. Luckily, in addition to the president's unwavering bravado, he also has a mech robot suit thing with which to stomp and shoot his way to victory. Handy, that.

This suit comes complete with left and right weapon barrels, allowing you to choose from a variety of light and heavy artillery as you march around levels liberating (well, destroying) your country. You can also zoom around in mid-air and do massive double-footed stomps, useful for wrecking parked cars and buildings. The action is very much skewed towards destruction – lots and lots of destruction. You roam levels, shooting targets while smashing just about anything you can jump over for the purpose of uncovering hidden power-ups and ammo. It's literally you against the world. Bad luck, world.

Actually, it's not just you. Spoiling the game's simple fun immeasurably is your garrulous secretary, who advises you on where to go and what to blow up. She does so in the most tedious and repetitive manner and you'll often fantasise about performing one of your foot stomps on her head. When you die, she says "Oh, Mr President" three times, each expressing disappointment in your failure in a slightly different way. It's really annoying, and happens *every time* you die. After you've spent ages destroying every single breakable element of an entire level, only to be defeated by the end-of-level boss (which means you have to replay everything), the last thing you need is to be wound up by this stupid woman.

Still, if you don't mind playing the game on mute there's plenty of chaotic fun to be had here. It's simple, routine blasting and nothing is particularly ground-breaking or amazing, but at the same time it can be good fun nonetheless. The only thing going against it is that there are so many better games out there, capable of offering much more value.



VERDICT 6/10
NICE, SIMPLE, PLEASANT DESTRUCTION

GEORGE W. BUSH



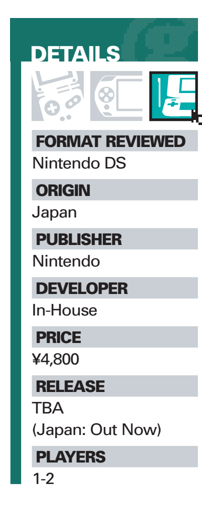
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



OTOGI 2


eMag



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Nintendo DS

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
¥4,800

RELEASE
TBA
(Japan: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-2

NO, YOU DON'T GET TO TOUCH HIM IN THAT WAY…

CATCH! TOUCH! YOSHI!

We reckon an appropriate subtitle for *Catch! Touch! Yoshi!* would be 'appearances can be deceptive'. Don't be fooled by its simple 2D looks and seemingly straightforward gameplay, this is one of the most devilishly addictive DS games we've played so far and perfectly highlights the machine's unique abilities. The idea behind *Catch! Touch! Yoshi!* is simplicity itself – guide a falling baby Mario Earthwards to a waiting Yoshi, then find the level's exit. All the while you must collect as many coins and pieces of fruit as you can, while avoiding the numerous cute enemies and environmental hazards that litter each stage.

Both Mario and Yoshi can be guided to safety by drawing clouds on the DS's lower screen and it's possible to capture enemies and coins in stylus-drawn bubbles, which can then be used to slow Mario's descent or change his direction. Upon reaching the side-scrolling Yoshi sections you can tap the touch screen to throw eggs (handy for reaching bonuses on the top screen) or stop enemy projectiles with a simple stab. It's even possible to make Yoshi jump in order to clear gaps and kill enemies. It's this constant manipulation of the DS's screen that proves that games made specifically for this machine can work perfectly when developers don't try to shoehorn in DS features for the sake of it. While only Score Attack and the sublime Endless mode are initially available, attaining high scores in both lets you access Time Attack and Challenge modes. Though high scores seem hard to reach, careful placement of clouds, bubbles and eggs enables you to pull off impressive combos, which in turn allow you to rack up those all-important points.

Many will no doubt dismiss *Catch!*'s simplistic gameplay mechanics, but to do so would be to miss the point entirely. The DS's raison d'être is to give gamers exciting new ways to play games, and in this respect *Catch!* succeeds admirably. The repetitive nature of each mode is bound to irritate those who long for flashy aesthetics, and the multiplayer game will see little play, but if you can live with these quibbles you'll enjoy one of the finest games the DS has to offer.

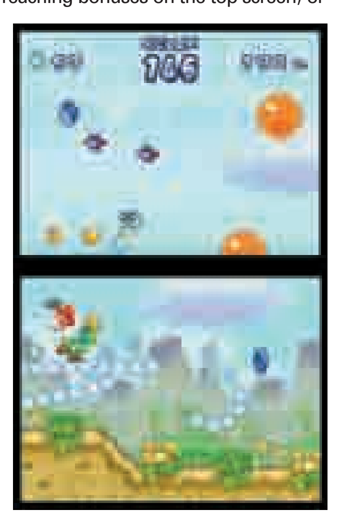


games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

DON'T COUGH: If you don't like the path you've drawn, blow it away with the mic and do a new one.

WORLD OF CHANGE: The more points you score in Mario mode, the trickier the Yoshi stages become.

Once you've mastered drawing balloons, you'll be able to capture multiple enemies with ease.

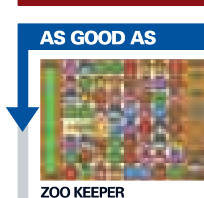


VERDICT 8/10
A UNIQUE TITLE THAT PERFECTLY SHOWS OFF THE DS

TOUCHED! MADE IN WARIO

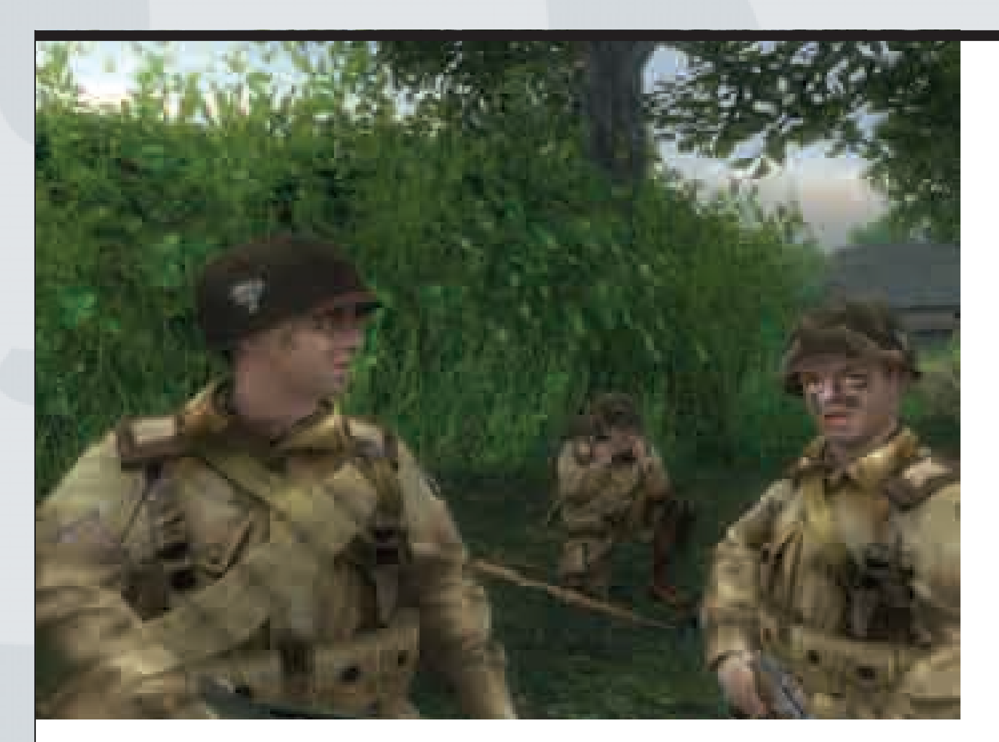
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



ZOO KEEPER


eMag



BROTHERS IN ARMS:

WAR IS HELL, AND GEARBOX WANTS TO TAKE YOU THERE

Everywhere around you bullets are whizzing past, perforating the wall just inches from your head, sending clouds of plaster onto your face. Your best friend lies bleeding to death on the floor next to you, and in your hands an almost empty rifle shakes uncontrollably. There's an explosion a few feet away; your hearing and vision blur, leaving you temporarily incapacitated. Someone is shaking you, and as they begin to come into focus you hear them shout above the din "What do we do now, sir"? One thought pops into your baffled brain – 'did I save the game recently?'.

Whereas games still have plenty of distance to cover between their current state and that of the frightening realism that may well replace the need for real life, most developers are striving to make each new experience more believable than the last. Gearbox has tried to cut through the glitz of sensationalist war to produce a game that's as authentic as it is entertaining, but the real question is whether *Brothers In Arms* can achieve both its goals. Too much authenticity is never healthy in an entertainment medium that aims to give people superhuman powers and adrenaline rushes at every turn, but too little realism would seriously undermine the entire concept of the game. Luckily, it appears that Gearbox has managed to find a happy medium, and as such *Brothers In Arms* will surely be a product of which the developer will be proud. However, most gamers know that such labours of love can leave the creators with a distinct lack of objectivity, making something that may seem fascinating to them, but dull as ditchwater to the average gaming Joe.

This is why *Brothers In Arms* will undoubtedly divide opinion. There is no denying that it's a magnificently made title, from the detailed visuals based around real locations right through to the painstakingly recreated events from the D-Day accounts of a group of US paratroopers. The game does a first-class job of immersing its audience within the world it is presenting, starting with a well-narrated voice-over and continuing with cut-scenes that help to keep the player in the thick of the action. The computer-controlled characters are easily the finest on the Xbox, and emotion drips from every pore, largely due to their superb facial expressions and genuinely witty banter between missions. Add to this the fact that the sound effects are razor sharp as they boom out in Dolby Digital and it's safe to say that in terms of atmosphere there are few games that come close to rivalling *Brothers In Arms*.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Gearbox

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4





Kill the Germans manning the machine gun nests and then turn their bullets on their own troops.



Ask your squad to lay down covering fire on enemies so you can escape their sight long enough to reach the next piece of cover.

BE AWARE

In keeping with the game's strategic leanings Gearbox has implemented a Tactical Awareness mode that shows a 3D map of your squad's immediate surroundings. If any Germans have revealed themselves their location will also be highlighted on the map, allowing you to plan flanking manoeuvres and tactical suppression. According to the developer this mode has been included to make up for the fact that the soldiers of the time would have spent hours studying maps and aerial photos of the area, thereby having their surroundings in their heads. The value of this map is fairly minimal at the start of the game, but later on it becomes invaluable for outsmarting the AI enemies.

games™

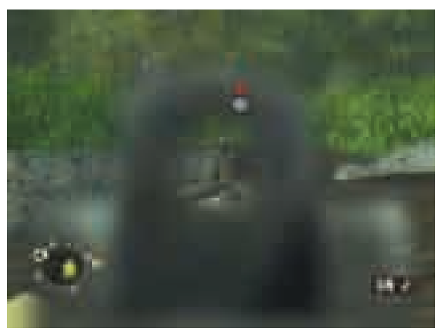
FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

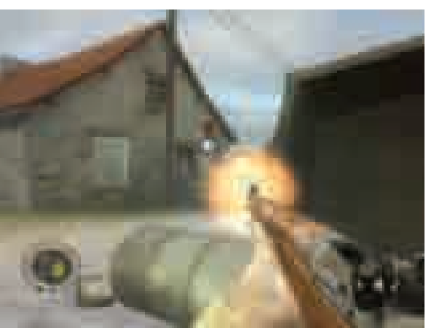
AUTHENTICITY: All the weapons, locations and characters are accurate likenesses of the real thing.

SPOT-ON: Even the time of day and weather conditions have been recreated perfectly.

ROAD TO HILL 30



The sights on your weapons are mostly redundant, so scenes like this are mostly reserved for sniping enemies from a distance.



The weapons are impressively and lovingly recreated in this game, making it 100 per cent more authentic than the *Medal Of Honor* series.

However, all these positive factors come at a cost. Anyone looking to engage deeply with the experience will find themselves well rewarded by the gameplay. Using your allies wisely to outflank German positions and meet strategic objectives is a matter for the brain as well as the well-trained trigger finger, and you may find yourself repeating certain sections time and time again until a new tactic makes itself apparent. These 'Eureka!' moments are what will give the game its longer lasting appeal among the squad-shooter faithful. But the game will not satisfy anyone after a quick, no-strings-attached blast-fest. It's not simply a case of charging from objective to objective, mowing down Nazis with a Bren gun à la *Medal Of Honor*, and anyone unwilling to engage with the story and use the squad commands properly will come away feeling bored and cheated. Aiming isn't anywhere near accurate, and although Gearbox will say that this is used to encourage the tactical element of the game (as well as reflect the weapons of the period), many will be hard-pressed to swallow this explanation. In addition to this, the game is surprisingly linear and visually repetitive; again to push players in the direction that the overall story is trying to take them in.

Anyone looking to test their reflexes should stick to games like *Call Of Duty* and *Halo 2*. *Brothers In Arms* never manages to match the breakneck pace of these titles, but in many ways Gearbox should be applauded for taking the first-person shooter genre in a bold new direction. Online play may satisfy the action junkies, but during the bulk of the game, players must be willing to sit back and let the developer tell the story.



VERDICT 7/10

ONE OF THE BETTER WWII GAMES AROUND

MEDAL OF HONOR



BETTER THAN



WORSE THAN



RAINBOW SIX 3

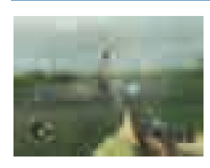
FAQs

Q. 'HISTORICALLY ACCURATE'. ISN'T THAT ANOTHER TERM FOR BORING?
Absolutely not. Although the game follows history, it has been adapted to make the experience enjoyable.

Q. DOESN'T GEARBOX JUST MAKE OTHER PEOPLE'S GAMES?
Not any more, as *Brothers In Arms* should give it the financial freedom to take on more solo projects.

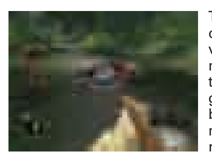
Q. IS IT BETTER THAN MEDAL OF HONOR?
Get out of our sight. *Medal Of Honor* cowers behind a wall, while *Brothers In Arms* wins a Purple Heart.

PS2 — £39.99 — OUT NOW

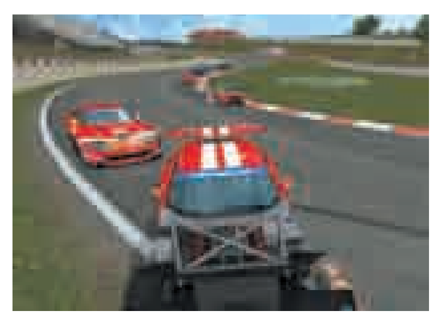


It's surprising Gearbox managed to get this running on a PS2 at all. The Xbox version suffers huge loading times, which make this iteration even more of a slog. Still, it's solid enough.

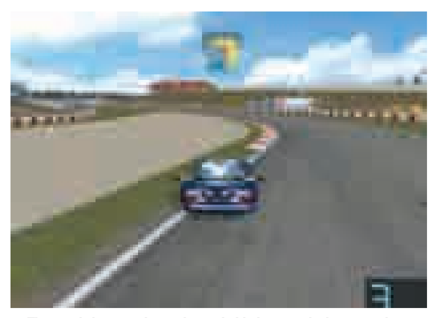
PC — £34.99 — OUT NOW



The game works well on the PC. The visuals are even more crisp than on the Xbox, and the game feels that little bit quicker with a mouse and keyboard, rather than a pad.


The cars are remarkably deformable, as this idiot proves.


On longer races, tyre wear and weather will affect who wins.


The usual views are here – in-car, behind-car, on the bonnet and so on.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Worldwide

PUBLISHER
Atari

DEVELOPER
SimBin

PRICE
£34.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-56

MINIMUM SPEC
1GHz CPU (AMD/Intel), 384Mb RAM, 32Mb graphics card, 1Gb hard disk space

GTR – FIA GT RACING GAME

WHY, ATARI – WITH THIS REALISM, YOU ARE SPOILING US

We live in an age where game development costs millions, requires huge teams of people and is big, big business. Bedroom programmers like the Collyer brothers are rapidly becoming a thing of the past, as the lack of funds ensures that only the big brands and the big boys survive, right? Wrong. The world may be heading that way, but it hasn't got there just yet – and *GTR – FIA GT Racing Game* is a fine example of strike one to the little guy.

The game has sprung from a group of modders who got together to create a mod version of EA's *F1 Championship*, using FIA cars. It took the net by storm and attracted the interest of 10tacle Studios who gave the team the backing it needed to go full time – and this is the result. Anyone who played the *GTR* mod of *F1 Championship* will know that it was all about realism and, given the financial resources it needed, SimBin has gone to town with *GTR*. Not only are the cars incredibly deformable, they sound right, they look right and they can be tinkered with for forever and a day (provided you know what you're doing). The tracks are a marvel to behold: as races progress, more rubber is laid down, loosening grip. Changes in temperature will also affect track speed, and bits of debris from tyres will also accumulate.

GTR is a truly awesome racing game that will have petrolheads in raptures. However, the extreme nature of the game is intimidating, even for the hardened racer. This is not a game for the faint-hearted or the easily frustrated because one error will see you out of the race – and in Career mode, you'll be making an awful lot of mistakes before you get things right. Fortunately, there's also a fully fledged Arcade mode that's far more forgiving, but holds plenty of appeal in its own right and would actually represent decent value for money as a standalone product. Oh, and did we mention 56-player races over the net?

GTR – FIA GT Racing Game really is a racing enthusiast's dream come true and is one of the best racers available for the PC. It is also a triumph for a small development team that started with nothing, and it deserves your support.

VERDICT 8/10
FAST AND FURIOUS, BUT EXCEPTIONALLY DIFFICULT

GRAND PRIX 3

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

GRAN TURISMO






eMag

CHAMPIONS: RETURN TO ARMS

SAME AS IT EVER WAS

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Snowblind Studios

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-4

If the PlayStation2 supported add-on discs for existing titles, *Champions: Return To Arms* would be one such item, as it fills the criteria perfectly. The same game engine with no improvements whatsoever? Check. No change to the premise of wandering through randomly generated regions, slaughtering monsters and collecting equipment in the hope that it'll be better than what you've got? Certainly. Multiplayer modes, plenty of monsters and items to find, even the option to import your high-level characters from *Champions Of Norrath*…? It smacks of a quick cash-in so much that you want to grab Snowblind Studios by the lapels and knock some innovation into it. Still, there's a smattering of improvements, albeit the kind that you'd expect to see on an add-on disc.

There are the obligatory new weapons, spells and monsters, but a few of these do make a difference. For instance, the inclusion of two new playable races on top of the original five enables players to adopt new playing styles to compensate for the close-range and long-distance abilities of the Vah Shir Berserker and Iksar Shaman respectively. There's also the option for players to turn their character evil early on in the quest (although this does little besides change some of the people you meet); the addition of extra – and extremely tough – bonus missions that can be completed to earn Champion medals and unlock even more secrets; and even new competitive multiplayer modes that allow you to pit your character against those of your friends.

Of course, if we're honest we're a bit miffed that *Return To Arms* is being touted as a completely new game (complete with 'new game' price tag) rather than an upgrade, especially since the original *Champions* game was just *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* with a lick of *EverQuest* paint. Nevertheless, the game's qualities as an action RPG can't be faulted. The almost endless number of weapon, item and location combinations created by its randomly generated environments means you'll never quite know what lies ahead, while the quest-led action and multiplayer functionality – particularly online – are compelling enough to keep you hooked for hours. It's just a matter of whether you can justify so much money for such little innovation.



Although quests are set in stone, the maze-like areas add random elements.

games™ CONNECTED

EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

THE MORE, THE MERRIER: *Return To Arms* lets players explore together through either a multitap or online; you can even import your character into someone else's quest and help them out.

CHAMPIONS OF NORRATH



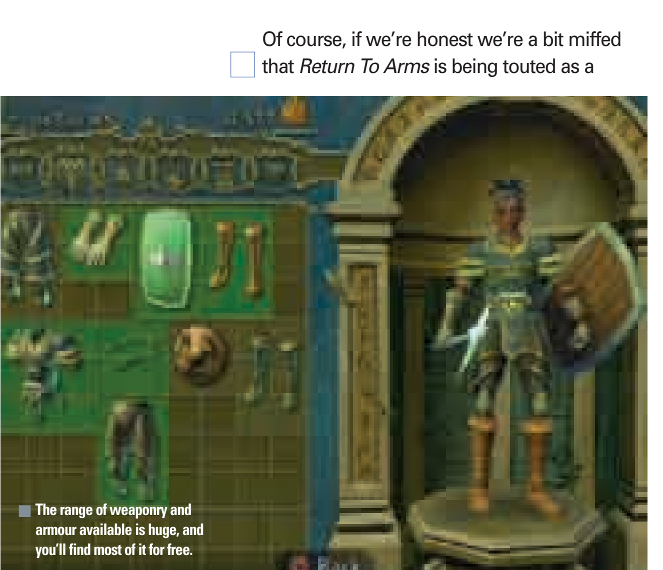
AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN

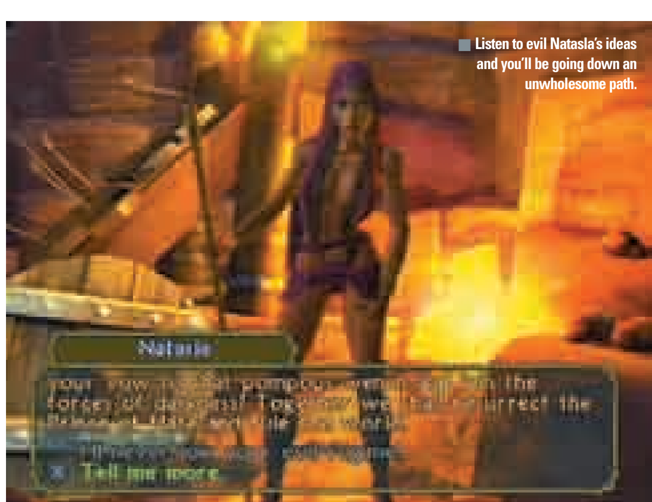


BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

VERDICT 7/10
AN ENJOYABLE IF RATHER LAZY FOLLOW-UP



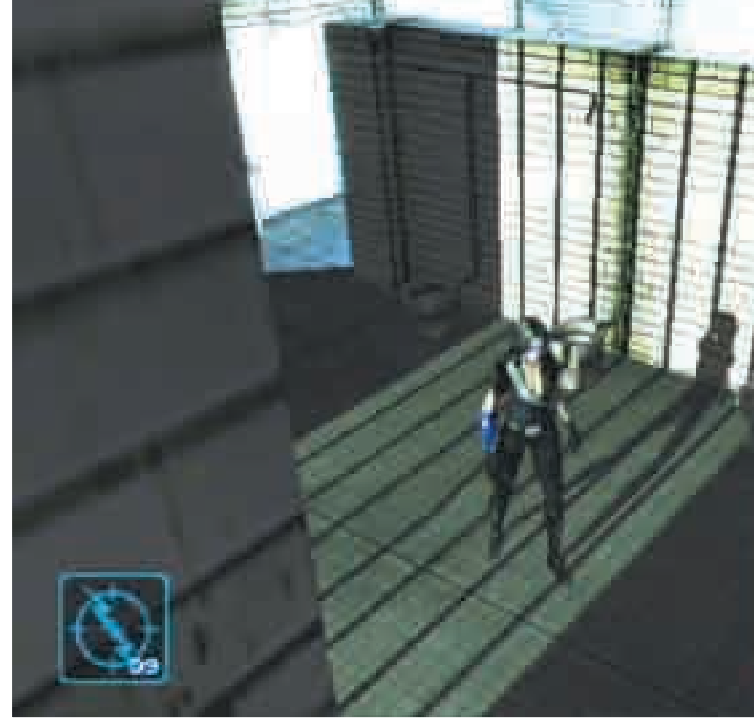
The range of weaponry and armour available is huge, and you'll find most of it for free.



Listen to evil Natasla's ideas and you'll be going down an unwholesome path.


eMag





STOLEN

YOUR FATHER MUST HAVE BEEN A THIEF – HE'S STOLEN THE STARS AND PLACED THEM IN YOUR EYES

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Hip Games

DEVELOPER
Blue 52

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

GETTING BURGLED



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SLY 2: BAND OF THIEVES

Thieves have it hard these days. Once upon a time, shops weren't equipped with elaborate alarm systems, CCTV didn't exist and people would regularly leave their homes unlocked. These days you can't so much as brush up against a stereo in Dixons without setting something off, cameras are everywhere and people are putting bear traps in their bedrooms to keep intruders away from the sock drawer. It's a wonder the common thief can still operate in such a hostile climate. It's clearly all about survival of the fittest. As *Stolen* attempts to illustrate, modern-day tea leafs have been forced to adapt to a new hi-tech world by inventing their own advanced ways of combating measures taken against them.

In *Stolen* you can't kill anyone. According to the developer, too many games let you solve puzzles the easy way, so unlike other stealth adventures where the most obvious and practical solution to a sticky situation is to murder, and then hide the bodies of, those capable of raising alarms and shooting at you, *Stolen* forces you to work around prowling guards by using cat-like flexibility, a range of nifty gadgets and plenty of cunning. While this is a brave attempt at pushing players to think a bit harder about the possible ways to solve problems, it ultimately leads to limitation and subsequent frustration. When you come up against guards – patrolling in that strict routine manner that most guards normally employ – you have a few options: you can knock them out – they'll quickly wake up and call for back-up, but the option is there; should you not want to knock them out you can try to sneak past them, which can be either really easy or impossible.

Sometimes, due to poor level design and a camera that causes frequent visual impairment, passing unnoticed is not going to happen. However, two factors swing things back in your favour. First, you've got a collection of goodies that enable you to both monitor and affect the movement of guards; second, the guards are really stupid. It's completely possible, after being seen by a guard, to run around a corner, climb up and hang from a wall and not be found. His head will be

■ This guard found us, but lost track of our location after we climbed round the corner of the see-through cabinet…





FINGERPRINT

games™

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

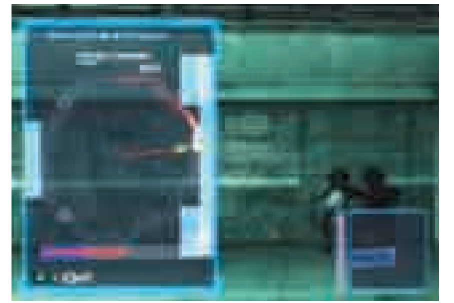
STUPID GUARDS: Hide from, and lose, dim security staff really easily.

INVINCIBLE: You actually have to rely on stealth as you can't kill anyone.

CAN YOU HACK THE PACE?

As well as climbing walls, stealing expensive items and evading dim-witted guards, you're occasionally required to crack safes, pick locked doors, cut holes in sealed ventilation shafts and hack into computer terminals in order to unlock doors and download new map data. Each of these tasks requires you to complete a crude puzzle that resembles a simplified process of the actual task involved; for instance, when picking a lock you have to match up key-like shapes. The puzzles are quite easy – much easier than hacking into a computer or picking a lock in real life. However, the difficulty lies in the way guards continue to patrol in real time as you concentrate on the task in hand. Forgetting to keep an eye out can be fatal.









This is just one example of the many puzzle sequences littered throughout the game.

We stayed in this position for ages. Not one of the guard's bullets actually hit. Broken.

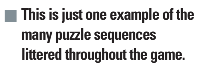
inches away from your suspended backside, but he'll just turn around and walk away. Sure, you have to be in the shadows for this to work, but what real-life guard would follow you into a dead end only to give in when you're not immediately visible? It's ridiculous.

Other things that are utterly nonsensical include (yet are not limited to) being able to outwit guards by shimmying around a solitary but, more importantly, entirely transparent glass cabinet; having guards call off searches because you've entered a vent they're not programmed to acknowledge, let alone navigate; and watching in wonder as your Sonic Emitter's loud, high-pitched tone goes unnoticed until guards have completed their conversations.

The Sonic Emitter is one of your special toys. Once placed you can set it off whenever you want guards to look the other way. Which they always do. Any human guard would follow the noise to its source, discover the gadget and then try to find whoever put it there. In *Stolen* this doesn't happen – guards simply stand around, shining their torches at the floor muttering "where's that noise coming from?" until you take your finger off the button and release them from this eternal prison.

Away from the broken AI (constantly an issue because you're not allowed to kill anyone) the game is simply a tedious trawl through rooms containing puzzles that you overcome by leaping, climbing and swinging from pipes. The fundamental idea in *Stolen* is (with a few exceptions) to infiltrate buildings, steal things and escape. Sometimes you may get a glimmer of a fun game lurking beneath the shadows of brokenness, but it doesn't last – nothing works right, there's no charm and it's all really boring.

Stolen is a grubby looking, badly conceived and hastily programmed game that does nothing for the genre except add unnecessary limitations. Blue 52 had an admirable intention to produce a stealth game where players couldn't rely on killing guards to get through levels, but it hasn't worked. It's hard to tell if it ever could work – *Stolen* doesn't come close to competently executing the idea. If you want stealth and own an Xbox, buy *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* instead, it's leagues ahead of this. And there's killing, which is probably what you really want anyway.



FAQs

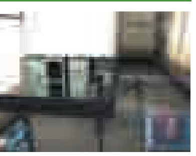
Q. SO YOU CAN'T KILL ANYONE?
Correct. You can punch and choke, but never permanently incapacitate.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE GADGETS?
Some are genuinely useful, though many could be omitted in favour of the ability to kill.

Q. WHAT'S THE AI LIKE?
As bad as anything you've seen before. Truly shocking.

VERDICT 3/10
VERY LIMITED AND INEXCUSABLY BROKEN

XBOX £39.99 OUT NOW



The main differences between the versions are entirely cosmetic. While the Xbox game is still as worthless to the stealth genre as the PS2 offering, it fares much better in the frame-rate stakes, holding itself together much better than the stuttering PS2 version.



DARWINIA

FUTURES MADE OF VIRTUAL INSANITY

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Introversion

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (2-4 Online)

MINIMUM SPEC
600MHz processor, GeForce2 graphics card, 128Mb RAM, 10Mb Hard Drive Space, Windows 98, DirectX 9

Gigabonkers. That's the only word that can really describe *Darwinia*. And despite making it up, even we're not sure what that actually means. Retro chic is order of the day in what is described by its creators as "*Cannon Fodder* meets *Tron*" – this is as curiously stylish a god game as we're ever likely to see. And the game's basic nature doesn't stop with the presentation.

Everything about *Darwinia* is incredibly simple. With no interface as such and minimal controls, anyone can get to grips with it in seconds – ironic when you consider that only the hardcore are likely to see past the 8-bit visual theme. Regardless, the action-RTS tomfoolery is remarkably compelling once you get a feel for the basics. Creating squads of soldiers allows you to dispatch the hordes of Virii while nearby engineers can reconvert their remains into Darwinians, the hapless virtual citizens of this bizarre world. This process is only part of the battle, though – often, you'll have to rescue a certain number of these primitive digital life forms, and since you're unable to control them directly a select few will have to be promoted to Officers. But even then, all you can do is establish waypoints for the little guys.

As you plough through the many overrun areas, resources and forces grow stronger as you allocate research time to each – you can build up troops to be more plentiful, improve the main system to allow more 'programs' (active units) to operate at once, or invest time in weapons and armaments to keep the otherwise defenceless Darwinians safe (well, safer) from harm. But perhaps where *Darwinia* succeeds best is in its control, reinforcing the impression of this being a believable computer-program-gone-wrong. Shortcut keys and simple mouse control make up much of the interaction, with only the game's 'gesture' system (units are created by drawing shapes with the mouse – it's like a DS 'feature' gone mad) deviating from the theme.

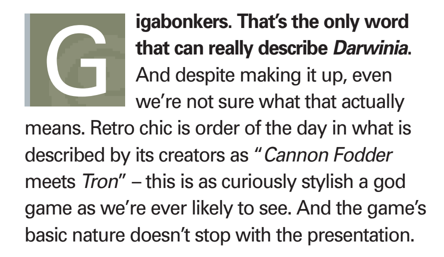
But with so much to look after, especially as the game goes on, *Darwinia*'s pacing starts to fall apart. Even after juggling several battles, collections or evacuations with a considerable amount of skill, it's still all too easy to spend the last portion of a level attending to all the more menial goals, especially since you can't actually lose a level – failing to meet certain goals might require you to restart but resources are bottomless. This can get a little irritating, but in its prime (which is a healthy chunk of the game) *Darwinia* is proof that you don't need huge budgets and flashy visuals to make a decent title; you just need a good idea and the brains/guts/vision/faith (delete as applicable) to see it through.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

RETRO: 8-bit sprites abound, from simple characters to *Space Invaders*.

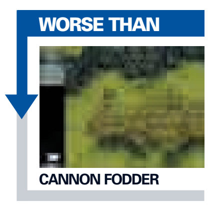
TECH ROMANCER: The front end and controls help draw you into the 'computer program' world.



BETTER THAN



WORSE THAN



CANNON FODDER

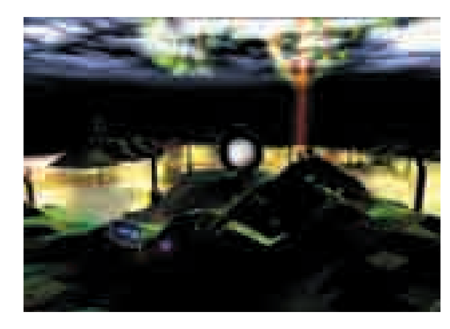
VERDICT 7/10
A UNIQUE AND REFRESHING EXPERIENCE

The Task Manager is where you make 'gestures' to activate new programs and keep track of active ones.

Promoting a Darwinian gives him a massive arrowed flag, telling the others where to go.








eMag

CAN YOU PUNCH LIKE A SOUTHBOUND FREIGHT TRAIN?

FIGHT NIGHT: ROUND 2

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
GameCube

OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Canada

PUBLISHER
Electronic Arts

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

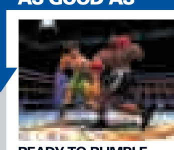
RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2

ROCKY LEGENDS

BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS



READY TO RUMBLE

***Fight Night* gave us an impressive slapping in the first round.** Some of us questioned the original game's control system when we first heard about it, but we were proved wrong. Very wrong, in fact – the first *Fight Night* turned out to be one of the finest boxing titles ever, so we were certainly going to be prepared for *Round 2*.

Instead of changing the winning formula and innovative control system of *Fight Night*, EA has simply enhanced everything. The area that's seen the most improvement is Career mode. Rather than just being for show, the performance you put on as you enter the ring will directly affect your stats, and having a few pretty ladies on your arm will aid you in recovering from a knockout. This feature makes you feel a little better about spending your hard-earned cash on natty dressing gowns and adds a more tactical aspect of play that was missing from the original. (Besides, we always felt bad about beating some guy's face in just so we could afford to buy a batch of fancy fireworks – now we've got an excuse.) The Cutman feature also presents you with another way to directly influence a bout apart from throwing jabs. Between each round you'll get a chance to mend your face the best you can by swabbing and applying coolant. It's a nice addition, as an inability to prioritise these wounds could well lead to you being pulled from the fight.

On the downside the cameraman seems to be having a few problems and the movement is noticeably more erratic than it was in the previous title. Whether this is deliberate to give the game a more exciting look we don't know, but it can sometimes detract from the action that's taking place inside the ring – no-one wants to watch a boxing match that's taking place on a 45-degree tilt. Also, as nice an addition as they are, the new all-powerful Haymaker Punches don't work as well as we'd have hoped. Admittedly, the Cube pad is largely to blame for this as controlling any punches using the C-stick is a weary and often unrewarding process, but even on the other consoles they fail to be either as easy to perform or as responsive as they should.

Although the Cube is cursed with the poorest control, the inclusion of SNES classic *Super Punch-Out* on the Nintendo console may lure gamers to buy for a format that they wouldn't normally consider. (We doubt it, though.) Whichever console gamers prefer, however, this is the best realistic boxing title we've played, and few fight fans will be disappointed.



This time the amount of style you have directly affects your abilities.

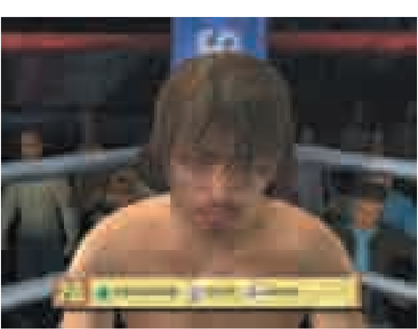
games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
FISTICUFFS: Score a one-hit knockdown with risky new Haymaker Punches.
CAN WE FIX IT?: Get back to your corner and patch up your face between rounds.



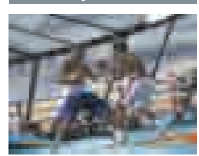
Floating like a butterfly is considerably more difficult than it sounds.



VERDICT 8/10
THE BEST BOXING GAME THERE IS



XBOX/PS2 £39.99

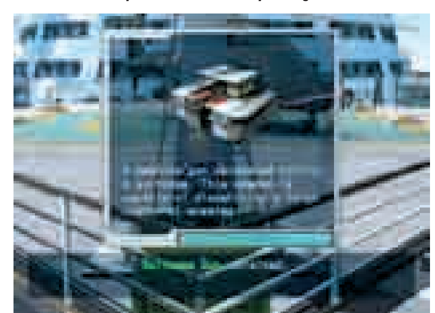


The lack of *Super Punch-Out* on both formats is a great loss but ultimately a small price to pay for the far superior control that the Xbox and PS2 pads offer. With little graphical difference between the three and loading times being similar, control is the main reason to shun the Cube on this occasion.


eMag



Death By Degrees' boss battles are laughable – this guy, for instance, fires bullets that you can't avoid, even if you dodge. Great.

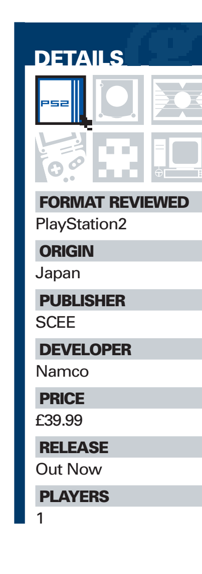




Events like this are common because, obviously, fending off ten guys at once with unreliable controls is great fun. No, really.

DEATH BY DEGREES

IF DEATH IS THE ALTERNATIVE, WE'LL TAKE DEATH



DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Namco

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

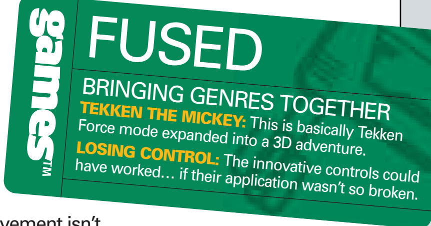
PLAYERS
1

So, tell us – exactly why do you play videogames? Entertainment? The sense of achievement from completing a challenge? The chance to pit your skills against anything a developer can throw at you? Or is it that you're a masochist who likes nothing more than rubbing various sensitive parts of your body with sandpaper and sitting on spikes for the fun of it? Because to be honest, if you fall into any category other than the last one, *Death By Degrees* really isn't for you.

Games don't often send us into a rage, but *Death By Degrees* succeeds by inventing an entirely new genre – the bland frustrate-'em-up. It's a remarkable concoction that leaves us wondering how the game got through any kind of approval process, thanks to the adventure elements playing out like an idiot's *Resident Evil* (horribly linear, with puzzles that practically solve themselves) and the combat being so bad it makes you want to weep.

Undoubtedly, it's the 'innovative' approach that Namco has taken with Nina '*Tekken*' Williams' fighting abilities that delivers the hardest blow. When we say innovative, the game takes the perfectly workable method of putting Nina's various attacks on the right analogue stick (something employed perfectly well in *Grabbed By The Ghoulies* and, to a lesser extent, *Rise To Honor*) and then breaks it utterly. Far from using a *Tekken*-esque range of moves, attacking enemies here involves frantically hitting the stick in the right direction and hoping for the best. Usually, considering you'll have huge gangs of enemies attacking at once, that'll work – although as even Nina's basic movement isn't very responsive and some genius thought to put Block and Attack on the same analogue stick, there's as much chance of you being slapped silly as scoring a direct hit. Even Nina's special bone-breaking attacks – which, despite looking quite nice, fail to make sense when an enemy with a shattered skull or broken arm gets up as though nothing happened – are little more than Namco spraying cheap perfume on a very large dung heap.

That Sony and Namco could actually think that *Death By Degrees* needs to exist is an embarrassment to both companies; it's an unparalleled mess of a game that manages to bore and anger in equal measure, exhibiting the occasional glimmer of a good idea only to snatch it away and laugh in your face. And that's being nice about it.



games™ FUSED

BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER

TEKKEN THE MICKEY: This is basically Tekken Force mode expanded into a 3D adventure.

LOSING CONTROL: The innovative controls could have worked… if their application wasn't so broken.



VERDICT 2/10

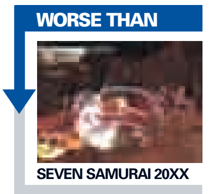
BARELY WORTH THE DISC IT'S PRINTED ON



V.I.P.

BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PlayStation2, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

DEVELOPER
Darkworks

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1

LEAVING YOU COLD FOR ALL THE WRONG REASONS

COLD FEAR

If *Resident Evil 4* is the Ridley Scott of survival horror, then *Cold Fear* has to be Michael Winner – they're in the same business, but not the same league. True, you could never really expect Darkworks' effort to revolutionise the genre (particularly since Capcom's reinvention turns the whole thing on its head) but we'd expected something better than this, an action adventure by turns patronising and confusing, incredibly linear and terribly convoluted.

Like the parasitic face-hugger rip-offs that act as the focus for *Cold Fear*'s storyline, the game's many faults gnaw away at all the good ideas contained within until there's only a husk of a game left. Still, there are a few nice concepts, not least the locality. The game's stormy sea setting (initially a hulking Russian tanker heaving from side to side, then a dilapidated oil rig a third of the way into the game) allows for some genuinely impressive visual effects, with rain lashing down and huge waves rising up to drag unwary players into the murk. That, combined with the ferocity of your adversaries – predominantly sprinting, slavering creatures that mirror *Resident Evil 4*'s approach to 'zombies', albeit in a rather less intelligent manner – and some cheap scare tactics makes for a fraught atmosphere at times, particularly in early stages.

However, because virtually all of *Cold Fear*'s attempts to terrify are so cheap the scares soon stop being scary. Light bulbs that blow at the wrong moment, cupboards that burst open as you approach, dead creatures (with key items next to them, naturally) that aren't quite dead… it's all so clichéd and obvious. And then there's the camera. While it's a source of genuine panic, this is because it does its best to stop you seeing anything. Moving to the over-the-shoulder view helps, but means you sacrifice the peripheral view; something that isn't much use when the game spawns monsters into areas that you saw were clear only seconds earlier. Throw in the game's insistence on locking and unlocking doors in a manner that makes you take the longest route every time and it's a lesson in pure frustration.

It's hard not to like *Cold Fear* for what it's trying to do, but it's also hard not to see the glaring errors that it makes along the way. Without the atmosphere, it's a B-movie at best – the kind of creature feature that only interests the most fanatical enthusiasts.



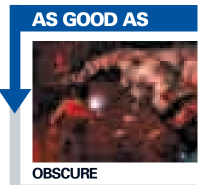
VERDICT 5/10
A BADLY ACTED HORROR-BY-NUMBERS

AITD: THE NEW NIGHTMARE



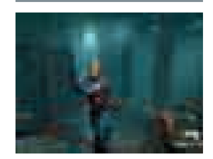
BETTER THAN

AS GOOD AS

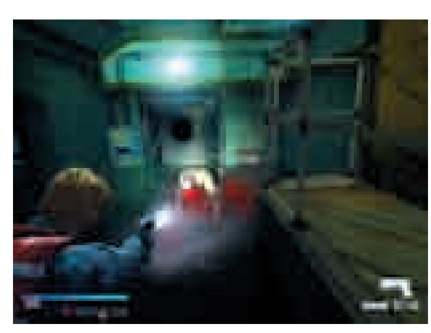


OBSCURE

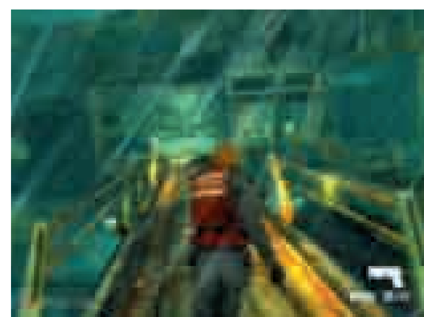
PS2/PC £39.99/29.99



No real differences here, aside from the obvious loading times and graphical tweaks, although the outdoor effects look great, even on the PS2.



Horror cliché #1: Anything that looks dead probably won't be by the time you're standing next to it. Best to shoot from afar, eh?



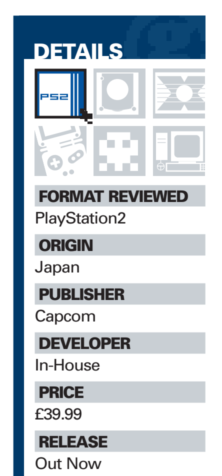
The outdoor effects, complete with pouring rain and gale-force winds, are lovely. Shame the rest of the game can't match them.



Being eaten by a pesky mutant freak? Get bashing those buttons – quick-time events are all the rage these days, it would seem.

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
SHIP AHOY: Some of the exterior effects on the ship or outside the oil rig do look rather lovely.
BULLY BONUS: Completing objectives unlocks the bonuses, including concept art and other goodies.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Capcom

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

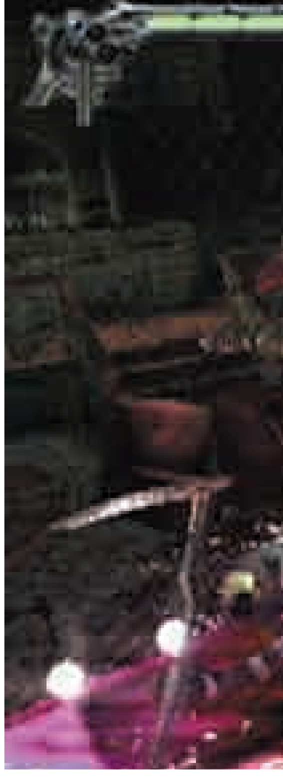
PLAYERS
1

MAY WE START AT THE BEGINNING?

DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

There are few gamers out there who can deny that Dante is by far the coolest videogame character ever. They could argue their point if they really wanted – all day and all night if they saw fit. They'd be wrong, though. The half-demon, half-human hero of the *Devil May Cry* series has it all: style, attitude and now a trendy new haircut to boot. He's a character that we'd all like to have a little more in common with, and to top it all off he's virtually invincible. At least, he is when left to his own devices and is performing in one of his many impressive FMV sequences; when being controlled by us mere mortals, he dies many, many times in a variety of ways. Sad, but true.

This latest game follows a trend that movies and games are becoming increasingly fond of at the moment – it takes us back to a time before the first game so we can find out exactly what makes Dante the 'man' he is today. Starting before he's even named his now famous store and with no devil powers in sight, you're pitted against one of the most clichéd enemies known to man and the bane of many a fine hero – your evil twin. Considering that Dante has faced a



Although usually reserved for strippers, Dante can put the poles in clubs to a better use.



The different fighting styles will greatly shape the way you play.

Mr Escher has a lot to answer for.





If you perform well enough on one of the stages then you can get your hands on this alien laser thing. Awesome.

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

COMBAT EVOLVED: Varying fighting styles mean you choose how you want to do battle.

BOSS OF ME: End-of-level bosses are now bigger and better than ever.

"THE AMOUNT OF ENEMIES AND HOW EXPERTLY YOU CAN DEAL WITH THEM IS ARGUABLY THE MOST IMPRESSIVE ASPECT OF THE GAME"

few shadow versions of himself in previous games this may not sound too tricky. But it is. Apart from being a much nastier person than Dante and – as the opening scene proves – a marginally better swordfighter, Vergil is almost identical to Dante, and they share a past that we can't even begin to explain on these pages. We'd rather let you play through the game so you actually earn the information that took us many long hours to retrieve.

One thing Vergil does have that Dante seems a little short on is friends – plenty of them. We get the impression that he gets out quite a bit more than Dante does. Maybe he frequents some of the livelier clubs in the demon world; we think this because he seems to have the entire army of Hell on his side, while Dante has to carve his way through various demonic incarnations all on his lonesome. The amount of enemies and how expertly you can deal with them is arguably the most impressive aspect of the game. While we've all seen two dozen enemies cluttering up the screen while you hack into them for ten minutes by repeatedly hammering a single button, *Dante's Awakening* does it properly. As with all the previous titles, the combat is superb, with basic combos (a misleading phrase as many of them look anything but basic) forming the foundations of battles, while those with a taste for visual flair can master every move and weapon available and dispose of enemies in a way that suggests that they have substantially more digits than the average games-playing human.

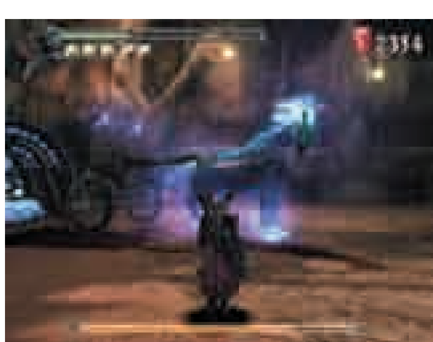
Adding to this combat system are the new fighting styles that you can foist upon Dante. By the end of the game you'll have the choice of no less than five of these violence-enhancing abilities and you'll have to make your selection

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

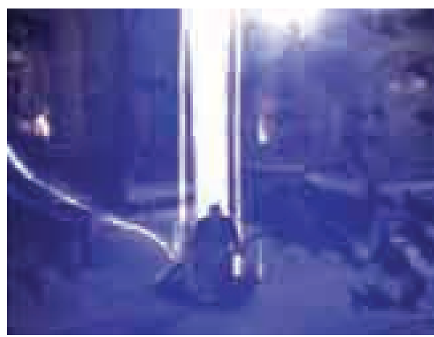
As you progress through the game, enemies who recognise your skills will reward you with new and more powerful weaponry. As you'd expect, each weapon has unique uses and choosing the wrong two to take into a level can often prove fatal – or at least make things that bit more difficult. These weapons take many forms, from your classic giant rocket launcher right the way through to our personal favourite – an electric guitar that throws purple bats at nearby enemies. As with the previous titles in the series, splashing the cash will improve all these weapons, and by the time you reach the end of the game you'll have a huge selection of moves and styles with which you can take on the demon world.



Is it us, or does it look like we're looking through an endoscope?

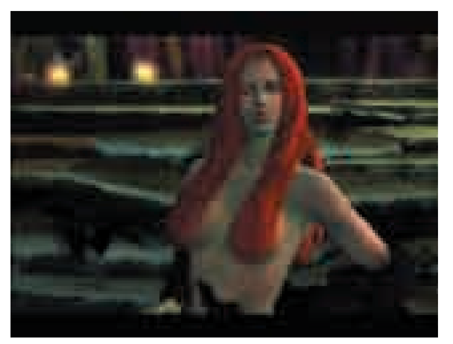


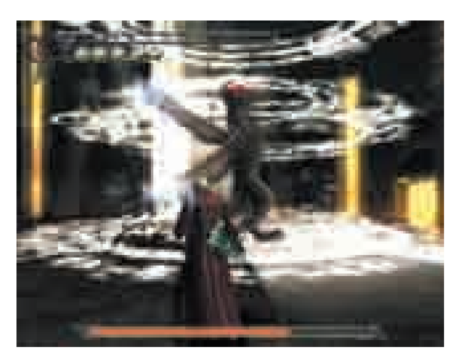
Let's see John McCririck offer the odds on this bad boy, then…



It sounds impossible, but Dante's guitar weapon makes him even cooler.







Making your way through an evil castle is never easy. Expect traps at every turn.

before each mission. Which of these you select will make a great difference as to how you fight, as some, such as the Royal Guard style, will aid your defence and others, like the Gunslinger, will boost your offensive capabilities. Predictably, there's even a bullet-time effect up for grabs eventually. Again, these systems all work extremely well and you'll soon find yourself introducing these new abilities into your regular combos to create fight scenes that make the previously impressive scraps in games like *Prince Of Persia 2* and *Ninja Gaiden* look, well, a bit dull actually.

Although many will consider it a massive understatement, it's fair to say that this is a reasonably difficult game. Even the easiest difficulty setting (which, in true *Devil May Cry* style, will only become available for selection after you've proved that you really don't have the ability to progress in Normal mode) is fairly unforgiving; and it's not only due to the amount of enemies and general toughness of the stages.

A gripe that's plagued the series from the start is that you'll probably end up playing through each level multiple times as there are no save opportunities mid-level or, more importantly, before bosses. Even an S-grade, flawless performance throughout a new mission will often result in some monstrously huge creature robbing you of an entire health bar with a couple of swipes just before you've managed to figure out a way to damage it. Unless you've opted against buying new abilities and wisely invested in a couple of hugely expensive extra lives you'll be back to the start to work though a level you've already seen. It happens a lot; so much so that persistence and patience are almost as important as skill if you want to make any progress at all. But as strange as it may sound, we quite like this.

FAQs

Q. IS THERE A DANTE MUST DIE MODE?
Of course. Good luck completing it, though.

Q. HOW LONG IS IT GOING TO TAKE?
A fair while. There are 18 stages chock-full of evil.

Q. BULLET TIME, YOU SAY?
What game would be complete without it?

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GOT STYLE?: It's the first time we've seen a man fend off demons by waving a motorbike around.

ROCK ON: The best guitar weapon since *Gitaroo Man* is on offer. Get it.



It clearly pays to be the evil half of a set of twins, as Vergil has plenty of demonic mates to help him take down his own brother.

THIS IS THE END MY FRIEND

If there's one thing we've come to expect from the *Devil May Cry* series, it's bosses that – if not handled properly – will take great pleasure in sending you back to the start of the stage without even breaking a sweat. It's a pain, but this is where much of the series' challenge lies and fans will be pleased to hear that this latest instalment contains some of the best bosses yet. Whether it's a giant flaming horse or a three-headed ice dog, these screen-filling nasties are guaranteed to impress – first time round. Unfortunately, once you've beaten a boss don't think you've seen the last of it. All nine will reappear at the end of the game to give you one final kicking – an unnecessary, game-lengthening feature that Capcom has made us deal with before in *Viewtiful Joe*. You have been warned.



TIMELINE HIGHLIGHTS

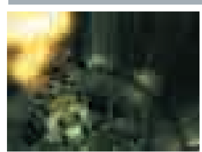
THE BEST BITS IN THE GAME AND WHEN YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM

30 mins



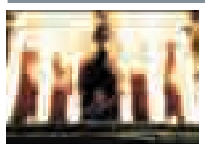
You've probably reached the first boss and died instantly. Get used to this. You'll find it will happen a lot. Still, you know what they say – practice makes perfect.

3 HOURS



After safely getting inside the tower you'll be taking down enemies with style and grace. You should have a few new weapons in your arsenal as well.

3 DAYS



If you're persistent then you should be a fair way through the game by now and things will be getting pretty tough. Look out for the horse boss while you're here...



"THE GAMEPLAY IS REMINISCENT OF A TIME WHEN COMPLETING A TITLE RELIED ON SKILL RATHER THAN GAME-SPOILING QUICK SAVES"

This kind of gameplay seems much more rewarding and is reminiscent of a time when completing a title actually did rely on a gamer's ability to play rather than revolving around game-spoiling Quick Saves that allow you to replay a section again and again with little or no penalty. It's an element that fans of the *Devil May Cry* series have grown to love, and although it may cause many to hurl their pad the length of the room in frustration, it helps make the boss battles exactly what they should be in every game – intense, adrenaline-fuelled experiences that you learn to dread.

Although there are bad points, many of them are hidden behind the veil of quality that's draped over the rest of the game. It's not always clear where you're meant to be heading – a huge irritant when faced with such a large play area – and you'll often find yourself wandering around the innards of a huge tower searching for somewhere to use the latest goblet/orb/staff that you found just beyond where you used the previous one. The increasing price of items as you go through the game will still hinder your progress and limit the extra abilities you can afford (an unnecessary feature in a game that's already reasonably difficult), and the last level is bound to frustrate even the most hardened *Devil May Cry* fan with its sheer harshness.

But, ultimately, this is a worthy purchase if you're the type of player who has the willpower to continue no matter what, and who's after a title that will both push your abilities and reward your efforts.

VERDICT 8/10

YOU MAY WELL CRY, BUT IT'S WORTH IT



The platform sections are challenging and work well – a rare thing to find in this genre.








LIFE
MAGIC



It's all in the angles, apparently **Equinox – SNES [Sony Imagesoft] 1993**


eMag



RETRO
MICRO GAMES ACTION
A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.30 APRIL 2005
00p
THE MONTHLY
OLD-SCHOOL
SOFTWARE
REVIEW
WE CHAT
TO JON
HARE
ABOUT
WIZBALL
GAME OF
THE MONTH
A DROP IN
THE OCEAN
WE TAKE A LOOK BACK AT ONE
OF THE GREATEST BRITISH
PUBLISHERS OF ALL TIME
CASTLEVANIA 64
MY GOD KONAMI,
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE...
HIGHLANDER
COULD THIS BE THE WORST
FILM LICENSE EVER MADE?
OPERATION WOLF
TAITO'S CLASSIC COIN-OP IN CLASH OF THE TITANS
STRIDER
A GREAT GAMING MOMENT FROM
CAPCOM'S CLASSIC PLATFORMER
PLUS
RETRO NEWS,
SIX OF THE BEST,
RETROSPECTIVE,
RETRO CONTACT,
ULTIMATE COLLECTION
AND MUCH MORE...

RETRO NEWS

Find out what's going on in the here and now of retro gaming

Considering how Ocean Software dominated the UK gaming scene in the mid-Eighties and early Nineties, it's amazing to think that there's so little information readily available about the company.

Of course, if you dig deep enough you'll find out what you want to know, but it's still worrying to think that so much of our gaming heritage is disappearing without trace. The amount of time we've spoken to publishers about old products, only to be told that they have no resources for them is shocking. A few months back, a famous Japanese developer and publisher (we'll spare its blushes) left us dumbfounded when it asked us for a poster of one of its games that it had seen in our retro section. The game in question was massive in the Eighties and had recently received an excellent sequel, yet the minds that spawned it couldn't even lay their hands on a simple poster.

Sadly, that isn't an isolated case. It's a problem that's particularly apparent when a larger company swallows up a smaller one. Do games companies buy out the opposition because they genuinely respect the games they've recently acquired, or is it simply a way of neutralising the competition? Granted, there are a few publishers and developers that are fiercely protective of their heritage, but they have generally been in the industry for decades. For the companies that have been and gone – like Ocean – that heritage is slipping away.



Darran Jones, Retro Editor

Money for old Geotrope

CUTTING-EDGE NEW C64 TITLE ON THE WAY

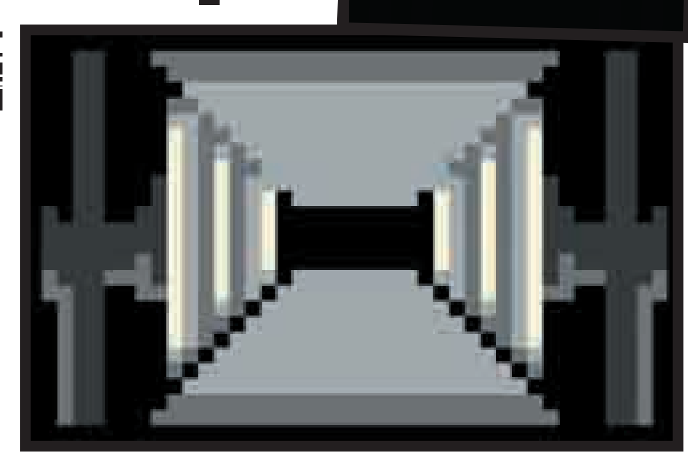
If you're a regular on the thriving Commodore 64 scene, chances are you'll already be aware of Computer Workshops. The talented developer and distributor is well known for pushing the technical limits on apparently outdated and limited technology and is currently working on an exciting new game for the C64.

Geotrope is due for release this autumn and is set to feature some of the most impressive graphical tricks that the C64 can handle, thus making it an unusual game for the popular computer. Heavily influenced by classic manga animations, *Geotrope* is a three-dimensional, first-person adventure game that has a generous mix of puzzle-solving and all-out action.

The actual 3D elements of the game will be created by using a unique and upgraded engine called the Nether Engine and will also feature texture mapping and dynamic lighting that will run at a minimum of ten frames per second. If that doesn't sound impressive, bear in mind that it's running on a 2D graphic chip that's 23 years old and can only display 16 colours.

Geotrope is to initially be released as shareware, and a playable portion will be released for free. While the registration fee is yet to be decided, Computer Workshops is expecting it to eventually cost $15 (around £8) for use on emulators, with an additional duplication cost if you're after a floppy disc version.

Visit www.armory.com/~spectre/cwi/geotrope/ for a trailer and more information about the game.



▲ Alright, don't snigger. It's a corridor, okay? And it's in *3D* – on the *Commodore 64*. More impressed now, eh?

WHATEVER NEXT?

NATIONAL LOTTERY AND BURGER KING JUMP ON THE RETRO BANDWAGON

The popularity of retro gaming seems to be spilling out into all areas of daily life. For instance, visit your local newsagent and you'll be able to pick up Pac-Man scratch cards. The card has a distinct retro look and gives you five chances to make Pac-Man eat his way across a row of dots without meeting any ghosts.

If you win, you could perhaps use the £50,000 top prize to fund a trip to America, where Burger King is now giving away portable versions of classic Atari games with children's meals. The LCD titles include *Grand Prix*, *Barnstorming*, *Kaboom* and *Tennis*, and are bound to be popular both with retro gaming fans and collectors of fast-food merchandise (of which there are a worrying number).

This does beg the question of what we'll see next – *Streets Of Rage* baseball bats? *Dizzy*-branded eggs? The mind boggles…



▲ Eating those tasty little dots could get you £50,000. Who said videogames were a waste of time?

GAMING NEWS

YOUR PAD OR MINE?

SEGA UNVEILS NEW PERIPHERALS FOR THE PS2

Any old-school gamer knows that Sega's Saturn pad and Virtua Stick were some of the best when it came to playing 2D fighters and shoot-'em-ups. They felt reassuring to hold and made pulling off Dragon Punches and Sonic Booms a cinch.



Sega obviously feels the same way as it's just released the pad and Virtua Stick in Japan for the PS2. Although the peripherals have been released to tie in with the Sega Ages titles *Fighting Vipers* and *Phantasy Star*, they're bound to improve your performance on any fighting game. There's no word yet if either device will be compatible with the Magic Box plug-in for the Xbox, but if they are, *Street Fighter III* and *Dead Or Alive Ultimate* fans will be very happy.

THIRD TIME LUCKY

MORE RETRO RE-RELEASES FROM MIDWAY

Midway is on a roll with its *Arcade Treasures* compilations, and a third title in the series has just been announced. Currently due to be released in the US at the end of 2005, *Midway Arcade Treasures 3* takes the franchise in an interesting new direction. Unlike previous compilations that featured a range of old-school classics, Midway's third outing has a broad driving theme and features plenty of solid racers. *Badlands, Hydro Thunder, Race Drivin', San Francisco Rush: The Rock – Alcatraz Edition, S.T.U.N. Runner* and *Super Off Road* are all set to appear and, with any luck, Midway will also include a few other titles and plenty of extras.

It's unclear what versions of the games will be used – titles like *Hydro Thunder* have been on the Dreamcast – or if Midway will do the conversions (the previous titles were by Digital Eclipse). What we do know is that if we can get perfect ports of *S.T.U.N. Runner* and *San Francisco Rush: The Rock* then we can't wait.

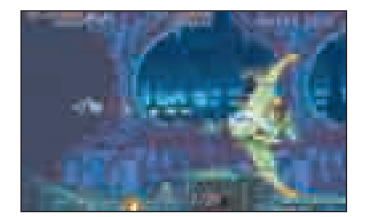
WE LOVE YOU, CAPCOM

YET MORE CAPCOM CLASSICS ON THE WAY

Finally, all the praying has paid off. After the success of last year's *Mega Man Anniversary Collection*, Capcom has revealed it will be releasing a *Mega Man X Collection* for the PlayStation2 and GameCube later this year. As well as featuring all the *Mega Man X* games, the game will also include *Mega Man Battle & Chase*, which is a *Mario Kart* clone.

Although there's been no official confirmation, we wouldn't be surprised if Capcom throws in a few more extras as well.

It would appear that the developer/ publisher has officially gone retro crazy, as it's also releasing another compilation called *Capcom Classic Collection*. Sadly, little is known about this second title, other than that it will feature at least 20 games, including titles that have never been released on consoles before. The anticipation is killing us…



Retro DIARY

As old-school gaming gets more popular, it's about time everyone knew about upcoming retro events…

MARCH '05

Sega Classics Collection

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** TBC

Sega's latest compilation features remakes of many of its classic arcade games and is available for the PS2. *Golden Axe*, *OutRun*, *Space Harrier*, *Bonanza Bros* and *Columns* are just a few of the games here, so start saving.

Retro Atari Classics

Date: TBA **Publisher:** Atari **Price:** TBC

The DS's first retro compilation is looking mighty interesting. Play original classics like *Asteroids*, *Tempest* and *Pong*, or play newly enhanced versions that use the DS's innovative abilities. Definitely one to watch.

Psikyo Shooting Collection Volume 3: Sol Divide & Dragon Blaze

Date: 31 March **Publisher:** Taito **Price:** £30

Japanese gamers seem to be getting all the classics at the moment, and March sees two more shmups appearing on the PS2. *Sol Divide* was originally released on the Saturn and PlayStation, while *Dragon Blaze* has only previously been available as an arcade game. Expect a review in a forthcoming issue.

APRIL '05

Trizeal

Date: 7 April **Publisher:** TBC **Price:** TBC

Apart from the fact that it's been converted from a Taito arcade board, little is known about Triangle Service's *Trizeal*. Still, it's a new Dreamcast game and, what's more, it's yet another shmup, so we're more than happy.

Dragon Force

Date: 28 April **Publisher:** Sega **Price:** £16

Dragon Force was a superb strategy title on the Saturn and featured tense battles, hundreds of sprites on screen at once and increasingly strategic gameplay. As a result, we're very interested to see what the PlayStation2 version has to offer.

AUGUST '05

Classic Gaming Expo (CGE)

Date: TBA **Location:** TBA **Price:** TBA

Last year's event was attended by none other than Konami and Midway and proved to be a huge success. As the expo prepares to enter its eighth year, you can be sure that 2005's event will be even better.

SEPTEMBER '05

CGE UK

Date: 1-4 September **Location:** Excel, London **Price:** TBC

After the success of last year's event, we've been told that this year's CGE UK is going to be even bigger and has now moved to London's Excel. Look out for guest appearances from Matthew Smith, Archer Maclean, Jeff Minter and several ex-Ocean staff. And that's just for starters….

Jagfest '05

Date: TBC **Location:** TBC **Price:** TBC

Details are still sketchy at the moment, but Jagfest UK should be returning this year. The event has been running for several years and has slowly been gathering momentum. If you're a fan of Atari's ill-fated console, check it out.

If you know of, or are hosting, any retro events, please contact the Retro Editor at darranj@paragon.co.uk

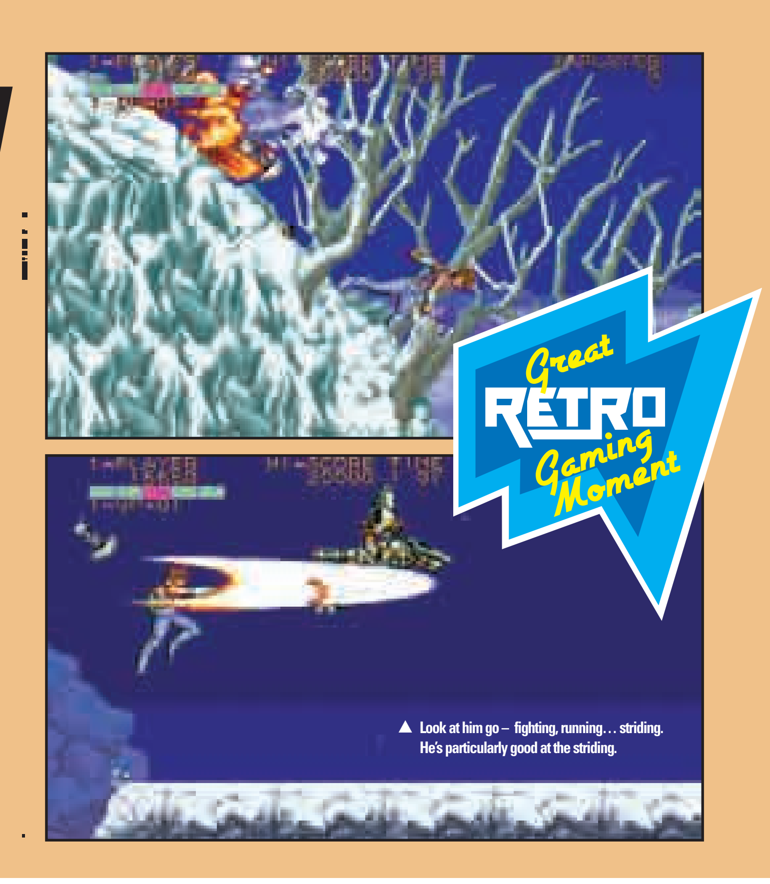


S•T•R•I•D•E•R

Format: Arcade
Year: 1989
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-House

Capcom's *Strider* was filled with some wonderful gaming moments, but few could match the exhilaration of its second level. After fighting your way through a hungry pack of wolves, defeating an immense, metallic gorilla and scaling some dangerous cogs, you arrived at the stage's apex. *Strider* boasted some superb music, but nothing could prepare you for the treat that greeted your ears when you first heard the appropriately titled *Big Run* and saw the breathtaking action that accompanied it. Pulling yourself onto a snow-covered mountain top you were immediately assailed by a tooled-up mini-boss that came equipped with a devastating laser and hard-to-avoid homing missiles. With *Big Run*'s beautiful notes still filling your ears, you dispatched the bothersome boss and fought on – only to find the ground tailing off into a treacherous 45-degree slope.

Unperturbed, your athletic ninja raced towards the cliff's edge and was soon recklessly running for his life. Numerous bombs were triggered off as you ran over them, but Strider was fleet of foot (providing you held right down on the D-pad) and easily avoided the explosions. As *Big Run* continued to build to a crescendo, the cliff dropped away into nothingness. Without even breaking a sweat, the impossibly cool warrior launched himself into the air, majestically cartwheeled through the sky and landed safely on the opposite mountain side. Just wonderful.





▲ Look at him go – fighting, running… striding. He's particularly good at the striding.

GREAT GAME BOSSES

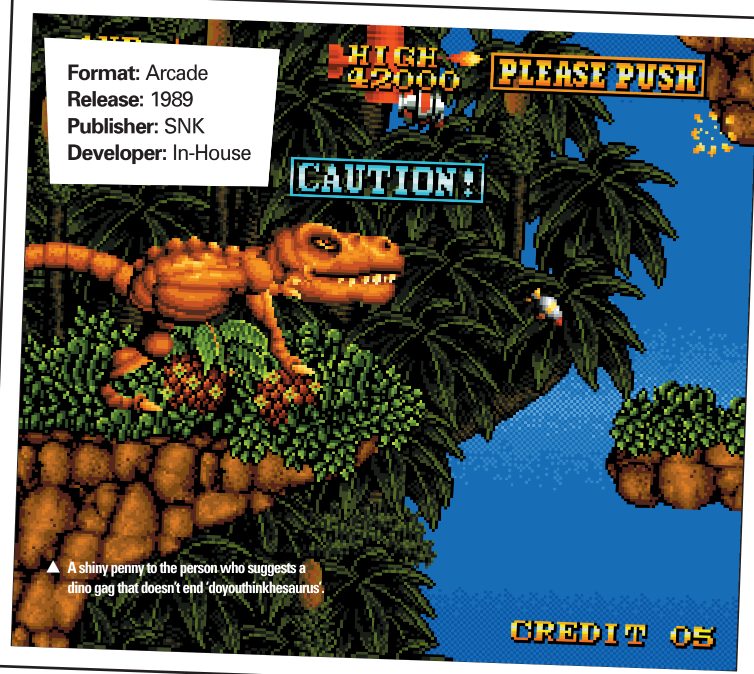
ALLOSAURUS IN PREHISTORIC ISLE IN 1930

It's not every game that allows you to speed through the sky in an old-fashioned biplane while shooting hordes of long-extinct reptiles, but that's exactly what happened in SNK's *Prehistoric Isle*. Starting as it meant to go on, SNK's superb dino-themed blaster threw cavemen, pterodons and even a plane-munching brachiosaur at you – and that was just the first level. So when you eventually reached the stage's guardian you knew you'd be in for something special…

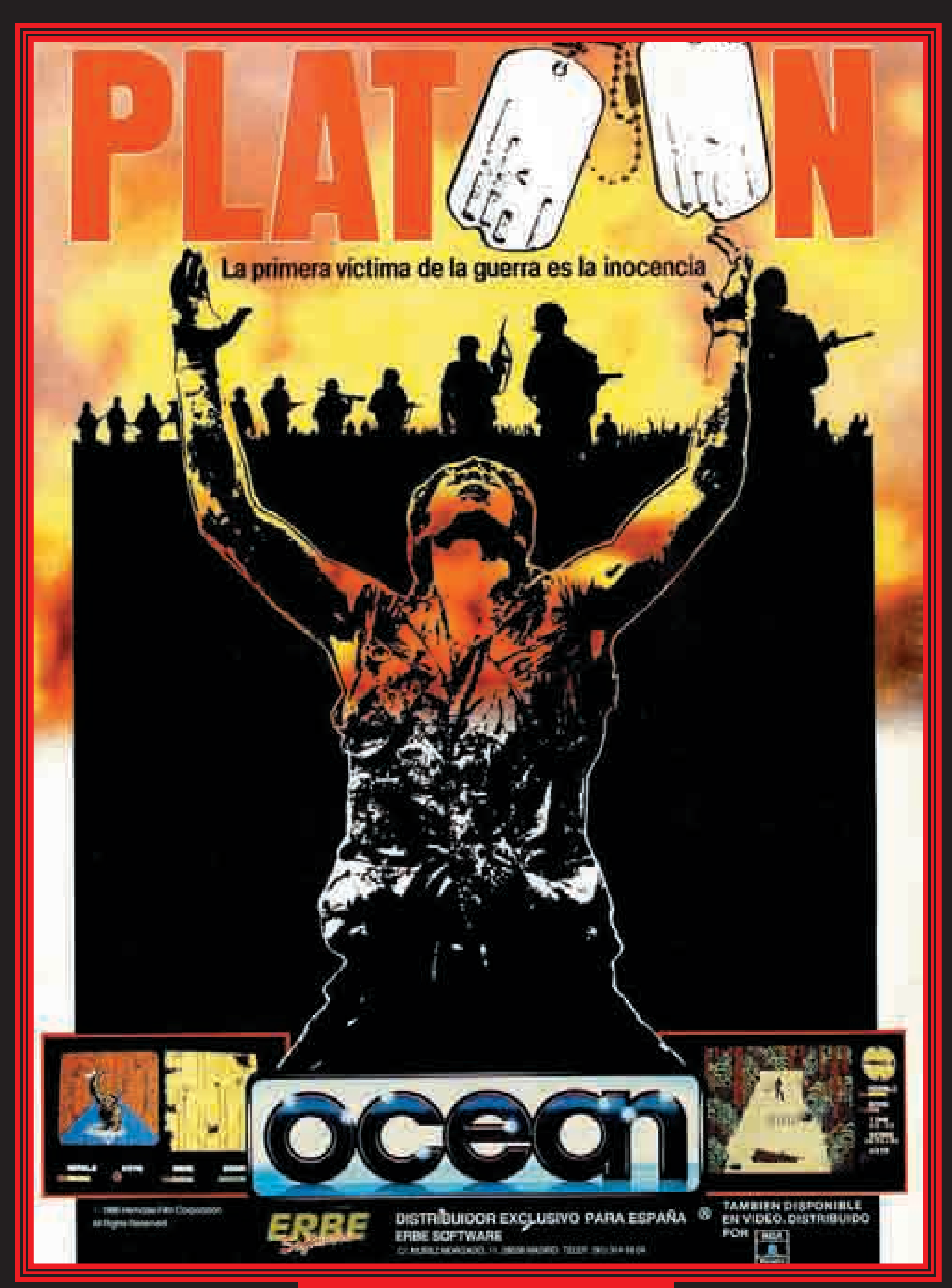
The first indication of danger (and a surprise that cost many gamers a life) was when the huge allosaurus appeared behind you as you were approaching the clearing where the fight would take place. Briefly disappearing off screen while his impressive stats were displayed (93 feet long and weighing five tons), the massive reptile swiftly turned round and rushed towards you. Cool as a cucumber, you backed away, only to find that the terrible lizard ploughed straight through you, taking one of your precious lives. Staying in the air in your plane did no good either, as the athletic dino could simply leap forwards and grab you with his teeth or, failing that, smash you into kindling with a devastating tail slap.

Fortunately, some deft manoeuvring and judicious hammering of the fire button on your part soon meant that the troublesome dino became extinct once and for all. Now where's that Tyrannosaurus Rex?

Format: Arcade
Release: 1989
Publisher: SNK
Developer: In-House



▲ A shiny penny to the person who suggests a dino gag that doesn't end 'doyouthinkhesaurus'.



PLATOON (Arcade) Ocean, 1986 – Spanish arcade flyer



THE BASTARD SON OF...

CASTLEVANIA 64

HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU BOUGHT THE SEQUEL TO A GREAT GAME ONLY TO FIND THAT IT'S RUBBISH? ALTHOUGH MANY FRANCHISES BECAME STALE WITH AGE, EVERY NOW AND THEN A SEQUEL GOT RELEASED THAT TRULY SHOCKED US WITH ITS MEDIOCRITY. WE'RE GOING TO LOOK AT SOME OF THE WORST FOLLOW-UPS EVER, AND THIS MONTH IT'S THE N64 VERSION OF CASTLEVANIA.

Format: Nintendo 64
Release: 1999
Publisher: Konami
Developer: In-House

When Konami announced it would be bringing its classic *Castlevania* franchise to the N64, fans started to get very excited. *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* on the PSone was widely considered to be the highlight of the series and, bar the odd blip here and there, the majority of the *Castlevania* games had been of a very high standard.

Granted, we were a little concerned when it was revealed that the series would be making the jump to 3D, but with *Symphony Of The Night*'s gothic beauty etched in our minds, we were confident that Konami would come up with the goods. How wrong we were…

Although everything appeared to be in place – skeletal warriors, huge, macabre bosses, and familiar locations – the entire game had an unpolished feel to it, no doubt due to it being rushed. It may have looked and sounded pretty much like our beloved franchise, but that's where the similarities ended.



▲ Why have beautiful 2D sprites and animation when you can have ugly, blocky, disjointed 3D characters?



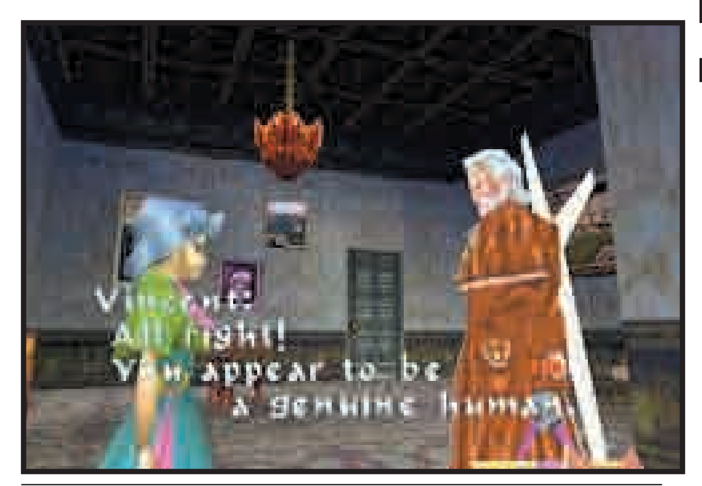
▲ Ray Harryhausen's skeletons could knock this sorry lot into the middle of next week.

Castlevania 64's biggest issue was its poorly implemented camera that made simple tasks like attacking enemies frustratingly difficult. Although Konami had been prudent enough to add a lock-on system, it was wildly inaccurate and appeared to have a mind of its own – the game would often insist on attacking enemies that were off screen, and while you were aimlessly hacking at something you couldn't see, an on-screen critter would be hammering away at your energy bar. Rather than featuring the elegant, simple battles that had punctuated the rest of the series, *Castlevania 64* became a disorientating mess that made your head hurt and your eyes bleed.

It wasn't just the combat that suffered from the newly added dimension, as negotiating platforms was just as tedious and often fraught with danger. Many jumps were ridiculously tricky and soon had you grinding your teeth in frustration. Previous games in the series used platforms as an afterthought and they never really impeded your progress (unless they were meant to); *Castlevania 64* often slowed to an agonising crawl, which totally killed the game's atmosphere. The RPG elements that had started to creep into the series had also been dropped.

Another backwards step was the tiny amount of weapons and items you could use – the arsenal available to Alucard in *Symphony Of The Night* was nowhere to be found here. While the acquisition of new items opened up previously unpassable routes in earlier games, the N64 version had none of this subtlety and subsequently became dull very quickly. There was no sense of exploration and whenever you did get to a new level the sparse environments and irksome camera soon made you wish you hadn't bothered.

Even though you could use two distinct characters, their paths were virtually identical so there was little incentive to play through



▲ Yep, that's a genuine human… and this, unfortunately, is a genuinely disappointing game.

with Carrie if you had already completed the game with Reinhardt.

Though *Castlevania 64* did have the odd moment of brilliance, many of the boss fights and set pieces were poorly implemented. Who could forget the atrocious maze with its wildly swinging camera, or the stage that saw you trying to move a bomb without getting hit by motorcycle-riding skeletons (yup, that's motorcycle-riding skeletons)?

Call us old-fashioned, but the *Castlevania* franchise should stay in 2D (or at least 2.5D). *Lament Of Innocence* on the PS2 did nothing to convince us that the series has found its feet in the third dimension and it's only the excellent GBA titles that have been keeping us going.

When *Castlevania DS* was announced, we were expecting a quick and easy port of *Castlevania 64*. Thank God Konami has seen sense and decided against it…

SADLY, THE LEGACY CONTINUED

Due to time constraints Konami made some quite significant cuts to *Castlevania 64*. While the missing material was reinstated in its follow-up, *Castlevania: Legacy Of Darkness,* it was a disappointing sequel. Okay, the visuals had been greatly improved, and two more characters also returned, but while there were quite a few new levels, you spent most of your time re-visiting locations from the previous game, albeit via new routes. It may have been a more complete package than its predecessor, but *Legacy Of Darkness* was still sadly lacklustre.



▲ Sure, you can play through twice with different characters, but why would you want to?

Worst LICENCE EVER

HIGHLANDER

COULD THIS BE THE LAZIEST TIE-IN EVER?

We couldn't give a damn about the risible sequels, but the first *Highlander* movie was utterly superb. After all, it had decapitations, Sean Connery and a soundtrack by Queen, so imagine how devastated we were when we got to play the tie-in game.

Your on-screen Connor McLeod bore little resemblance to his cinematic counterpart and lumbered around with all the grace of an arthritic rhino. Animation was virtually non-existent and the three characters you faced could have been extras from a Lego advert. Add to this some incredibly bland and basic backdrops, and you had a title that looked as if it had been created by a work experience kid. Who hadn't see the film.

Sound effects were even worse and consisted of simple bleeps and bangs that had little in common with the clanging sword action of the film.

McLeod may have had access to 14 different moves, but the stupidly unresponsive controls made them incredibly tricky to use. Even when you did manage to get a few moves out, the poor collision detection and rapid healing powers of your opponent made the whole exercise rather pointless, and unless you were some sort of sick masochist there was little reason to continue playing.

Even the two-player game couldn't save *Highlander* from being the grade-A turkey that it so obviously was. Ocean may have rectified many past mistakes with the likes of *Robocop* and *Platoon*, but we don't think we'll ever forgive it for this sorry piece of crap.





▼ We think you'll agree that playing *Highlander* is on a par with 'being' the Highlander…

A DROP IN THE ocean

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE NUMBER-ONE MOVIE, TV AND ARCADE CONVERSION SOFTWARE COMPANY THAT BROUGHT US SUCH CLASSICS AS BATMAN, ROBOCOP AND OPERATION WOLF? RETRO INVESTIGATES…

Ocean will be a familiar brand to many, whether they're heavily into retro gaming or not. During the Eighties and early Nineties it was one of the largest and most respected publishers in the games industry, frequently voted 'software house of the year', and responsible for a vast number of titles for the 8-bit and 16-bit platforms. Famed for its licensed titles and arcade conversions (some of which, admittedly, weren't that good), Ocean dominated the industry for over 12 years. Not bad for a company set up on a hunch.

Ocean founder David Ward was an entrepreneur with a knack for being in the right place at the right time. Not only was he able to spot new trends, but he was quick to act on them. This had already worked for him in the late Seventies and early Eighties as he imported exotic clothes into the UK (even if his first foray landed him a Spanish prison). A trip to America in 1983 gave him an inkling that computer games were likely to be the next big thing, and on his return to Britain he set up shop in Manchester.

Ward may not have had any experience in what was still a relatively new industry, but it didn't really matter. He knew how to sell products and his strong background in marketing immediately gave him the edge over his competitors. He placed adverts in order to find out what systems were popular and the types of games that people wanted to actually play. It was then simply a case of finding the relevant people who were able to create them. At the end of its first year, Ocean had a turnover of £500,000 and had shifted around 200,000 games; by 1988 this had increased to an estimated £10 million, with some 3 million games sold.

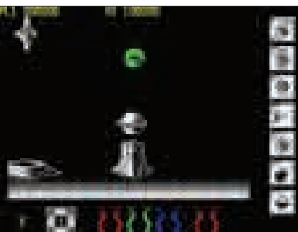
BIG BOSSES

Gary Bracey, former development director at Ocean, says that one of the biggest factors in the success of the company was the influence of David Ward and managing director Jon Woods. "Ocean was run by two very astute businessmen, who identified the potential early on and heavily marketed their brand," says Bracey. "Also, Ocean would not have thrived for so long if it had consistently released poor products. Fortunately, there were many truly great Ocean games, which tend to get forgotten as we were always

AN INTERVIEW WITH
MARK JONES

Time at Ocean: Two years
Job title: Graphic designer
Selected Softography: *Arkanoid, Magmax, Wizball, Gryzor, Vindicator, Dragon Ninja, Rambo III, Total Recall*

Anything you're particularly proud of from your time at Ocean?
Getting a *Crash* Smash for *Wizball*. When I was at school, *Crash* magazine was like the Bible if you owned a Spectrum, so anything that got a Smash was a must-have. Owning an original copy of a game *Crash* had Smashed was a great status symbol in the playground. Oh, those were the days.



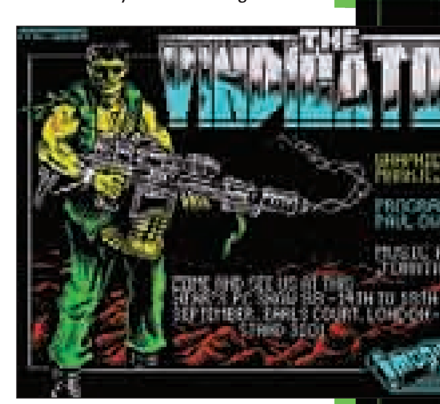
Was there much pressure working on the Spectrum version of *Wizball*?
No, none at all. Although once I'd finished all my graphics, the programmer took another three months to actually finish the code. As a result, lots of the stuff I'd worked on was chucked out, which meant that many of the previews in magazines featured screens that weren't in the finished game.

You created a lot of loading screens. How long did they take?
I loved working on loading screens. I suppose it was because you had more freedom in what you produced, and didn't have a programmer leaning over you saying 'I can't scroll something that big' or 'there's way too many frames in that animation!'. They normally took three or four days then you'd spend another day or so tweaking bits. The loading screens are the things I'm most proud of.

How did you find the transition between 8-bit and 16-bit?
At first it was really hard. I had only worked on the Spectrum and had no experience at using colours; anti-aliasing was totally alien to me. Fortunately, I got a lot of help from Simon Butler who took me under his wing. The biggest problem I found was that everything took a lot longer to produce; you could spend days tweaking coloured pixels just because something didn't look right.

Any other major game problems?
While we were designing the graphics for *Total Recall* the programmer kept faffing about with a scroll routine that featured street graphics and a man running on the spot. It stayed the same week after week, then he started 'working at home'. Eventually Ocean realised that he didn't have a clue and pulled the plug.

Any interesting moments during your time at Ocean?
I was interviewed in 1988 for a kids' program called *Chegwin Checks It Out* with Keith Chegwin while I was working on *Vindicator*. Sadly, I looked a bit of a geek at the time with teenage spots; it was all very embarrassing.



Retro Feature

LICENCE TO THRILL

OCEAN WAS WELL KNOWN FOR THE NUMBER OF COIN-OP AND FILM LICENCES IT RELEASED. WHILE THERE WERE QUITE A FEW STINKERS, MANY WERE ACTUALLY VERY GOOD. HERE ARE A FEW OF OUR FAVOURITES…

BATMAN – THE MOVIE

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Mike Lamb, Dawn Drake, Matthew Cannon
Tie-in with: DC Comics

Batman had quite a few outings on the 8-bit machines, but few were prepared for the great film tie-in that Ocean released. Like *Robocop* it was made up of various gameplay elements, all of which were pretty good. Although the 8-bit versions were fine, it's the jaw-dropping Amiga and Atari ST ports that really stunned us. The well-designed platform sections were totally surpassed by the death-defying (and stunning looking) flying sequences. Even today it all looks very impressive.



▲ The Dark Knight proved to be a dark horse, surprising gamers with this quality tie-in.

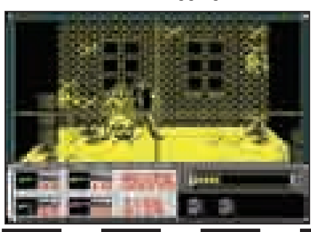
ROBOCOP

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Mike Lamb, Dawn Drake, Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Orion Pictures movie

From the moment you started playing *Robocop* it was obvious that Ocean had another hit on its hands. Great gameplay, plenty of variation and some superb music (especially on the C64) ensured *Robocop* was a hit with gamers everywhere. It may have lacked the gore that made the movie famous, but the excellent gameplay easily made up for this.



▲ *Robocop* was terrific, but our hero still had that vulnerable lower-face thing going on…



COMBAT SCHOOL

Released: 1987
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Mike Lamb, Andrew Deakin, Ivan Horn, David Whittaker
Tie-in with: Konami arcade machine

Damn you, Ocean, we've lost count of the amount of joysticks that we went through while playing *Combat School*. Best remembered for its superb remix of *I Want To Be Your Drill Instructor*, *Combat School* was a frantic joystick waggler that perfectly captured all the thrills and excitement of its Konami arcade parent.



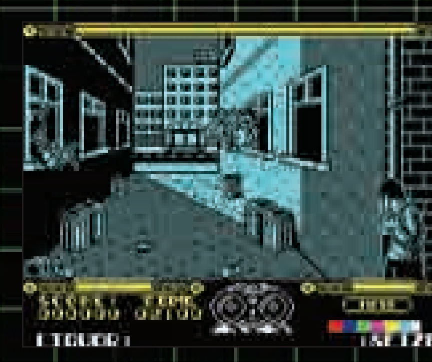


THE UNTOUCHABLES

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Special FX Software – Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Paramount Pictures movie

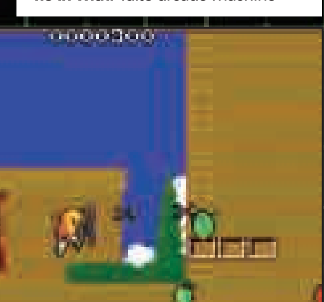
Like many of Ocean's later hits, *The Untouchables* mixed a range of game styles with great success. Whether you were running through empty warehouses or trying to protect a runaway pram, the end results perfectly reflected the film they were based on, even if a little 'artistic licence' was used here and there.

While the various shooting stages were very well put together (particularly on the SNES and Amiga versions) it's the superb Odessa Steps homage that stands out the most.



THE NEW ZEALAND STORY

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade platform game
Team: Choice Software – G Weatherup, Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Taito arcade machine



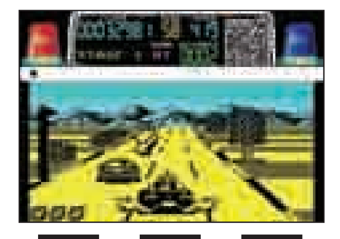
Ocean had a very strong relationship with Taito, so the wonderfully cute adventures of Tiki the Kiwi became a superb conversion that was a big hit. The Amiga and Atari ST versions were particularly good and still play extremely well today. Massive cute whales, arrow-firing teddy bears and boomerang-throwing soldiers were just a few of the enemies you had to deal with and all the while an incredibly jaunty theme tune played in the background. And let's face it, any game that features a cute leopard seal as its main boss has got to be a winner.

CHASE HQ

Released: 1989
Genre: Arcade action
Team: John O'Brien, Bill Harbison, Jonathan Dunn
Tie-in with: Taito arcade machine

For many, this is one of Ocean's greatest coin-op conversions. The Spectrum version in particular was extremely faithful to the arcade original (especially the superior 128k version) and it was only the risible C64 outing that really disappointed. While the 8-bit conversions could never hope to catch the insane thrills of their arcade parent, all the white-knuckle gameplay was mercifully intact.

Even the sequel was pretty good, but in our minds it's the original that deserves all the praise. A great arcade racer and a superb home port. If only all Ocean's many, many conversions were up to this standard.



synonymous with the many licences we produced."

Although early Ocean titles weren't exactly gaming masterpieces, Ward was adept at realising that a game didn't necessarily need to be the best around, it simply had to be available to the retailers and recognised by the general public. Because of this, film and TV licensing became an important part of the Ocean strategy and during the mid-Eighties it churned out a mountain of low-quality games with famous names on the boxes.

"To be honest, we were initially going for the 'granny purchase'," explains Bracey. "Computer games were relatively new and if a relative wanted to buy a game as a present they wouldn't know their *Elite* from their *Blagger*. By offering titles they were familiar with – and artwork which was also recognisable – we managed to capture an essential part of the market."

Between 1983 and 1992, licences and arcade conversions made up nearly 50 per cent of the 8-bit titles Ocean released. While many of these early games were highly dubious – titles like *Highlander*, *Street Hawk* and the infamous *Knight Rider* immediately spring to mind – Ocean was more than capable of releasing solid, enjoyable licences when it wanted to. *Robocop*, *Batman – The Movie*, *Platoon* and *The Addams Family* were all superb tie-ins that were massive hits with both critics and public alike when they hit the 8- and 16-bit formats.

GROWING UP

Ocean was able to corner the market on familiar game names when it bought Imagine in 1985. (The tale of Imagine's rise and fall is almost as epic as the Ocean story but, sadly, there isn't room to go into it here.) The acquisition of Imagine allowed Ocean to dedicate a part of the company to film and arcade licences (and the occasional original title), and with one of its rivals out of the picture Ocean's dominance within the industry grew. Key arcade titles like *Hyper Sports*, *Arkanoid*, *Renegade*, *Slap Fight* and *Yie Ar Kung-Fu* were just a few of the 50-plus titles that Imagine released for the 8-bit formats and it bolstered Ocean's output considerably.

MAKING MOVIES

Although the company released more than 115 titles on the Spectrum alone – leading, inevitably, to a scattershot approach to quality – as Ocean expanded it did take much more care when choosing licences. Although, as Bracey explains, it didn't mean that Ocean was impervious to mistakes.

"We were sent dozens of scripts from movies that were in pre-production – I still have many of them in my loft," he says. "*Robocop* was the first real speculative film which we took on as an unknown, but based on the strength of the script. The biggest mistake I personally made was choosing *Hudson Hawk*. The script, by Shane Black, was absolutely fantastic, but the film that was released bore no resemblance at all to the original treatment. A shame really, as it could – no, should – have been an excellent movie."

Ocean's arcade conversions went through a similar process and while early titles like *Mario Bros* and *Donkey Kong* failed to impress the games-buying public (despite being excellent arcade games) later titles had a lot more success.

TOP DRAWER

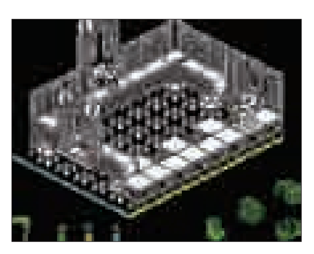
Will Harbison joined Ocean as a graphic designer in March 1988 and began work on arcade conversions like *Chase HQ* and *Bad Dudes Vs Dragon Ninja*. He's particularly proud of *Chase HQ* and still remembers the ups and downs of the Spectrum conversion. "When doing an arcade conversion the only thing we had to do was make sure the Spectrum graphics looked as much like the arcade game as possible," he reveals. "I think with *Chase HQ*, myself and John O'Brien did the best job that we possibly could. It was impossible to rip the graphics from the original arcade board so this meant we had to play the arcade machine for hours on end to get a feel for its gameplay. It was hell, it really was."

AN INTERVIEW WITH JON RITMAN

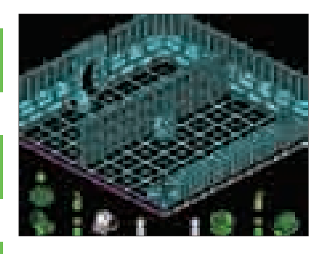
Time at Ocean: Three years (1984-87)
Job title: Freelance programmer
Selected Softography: *Head Over Heels, Batman, Match Day, Match Day II*

How did your relationship with Ocean come about?
I was at a Microfair at Alexandra Palace showing *Bear Bovver* when I found myself next to Ocean's David Ward and watching a truly crap soccer game (the one that was later re-released as *World Cup Carnival*). I commented that the game I was doing was going to be a thousand times better – a bit strong considering I had only started it the week before.

Anyway, some eight months later he phoned me out of the blue (I never did ask how he got my number) and asked if I'd finished it. By chance I was only a couple of weeks before the end and he promptly offered me a lot of money for it – at the time it was more money than I had ever had. Needless to say I accepted and a relationship was born.



What was your relationship like with Ocean on a personal and professional basis?
It was excellent. They were never on my back despite my complete failure to ever deliver in time for Christmas and they always supplied me with whatever kit I needed to get a game finished. In some ways the failure to hit Christmas may have helped me, as when my games were released at Easter the competition was often smaller and the magazine publishers had little else to fill their pages.



Do you think that games like *Head Over Heels* and *Match Day* would have achieved the same level of exposure if they had been released by a different games publisher?
Probably not – Ocean was one of the biggest companies around at the time. I was offered a very good deal for *Match Day II* by Mirrorsoft but when I told Ocean about it, they simply matched it and I stayed where I was.



What prompted the decision to part ways with Ocean?
The chance to work with Rare came up and I was so impressed with everything Ultimate had done in the past that I couldn't miss the opportunity. It was a strange situation as I wrote to Rare after they had a large piece published in a magazine and got invited up for an interview.

To tell the truth I didn't even realise it was an interview as I was riding so high after the Ocean years that I just assumed they would want me. Later Tim Stamper [Rare co-founder] told me it was the sheer arrogance that got to them as it clearly hadn't crossed my mind that they could have turned me down.

How long were you working for Ocean?
Fortunately, I never had any sort of contract deal; I simply made my games and offered them to Ocean. The four games probably covered about four years [around 1984-87, non-maths fans], as I was fairly lazy, thinking nothing of taking three-month breaks in the middle of a game.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOHN LOMAX

Time at Ocean: Five years (1992-97)
Job title: Artist
Selected Softography: *Dennis, Jurassic Park II, Silver, Dawn Of Darkness*



How did you first get into videogaming?
Ever since I got a Philips G7000 console for Christmas I've been hooked on games. I got into the industry through creating Amiga demos. Many of my friends at the time kept telling me to send in some work to game companies, so I did. I must have sent demos to five or six big companies at the time; luckily, Ocean offered me a position.



How would you describe your time at Ocean?
The first few years were fantastic times, although later on, once Ocean got 'acquired' by Infogrames, things started to take a turn for the worse. To be honest, the times during the creation of *Jurassic Park II* were some of the best times I've ever had in the industry to date and I miss them greatly.



Was there much pressure to produce the goods when working on film and TV licences?
Well, there could be times when film companies would frustrate the hell out of you with bizarre requests like asking for game sprites to accurately represent the real life actors when you only had 32 pixels to play around with. Completion deadlines would also often be tied to the film release, so hitting these was vital or you would seriously impact on the game sales if your title wasn't completed in time.

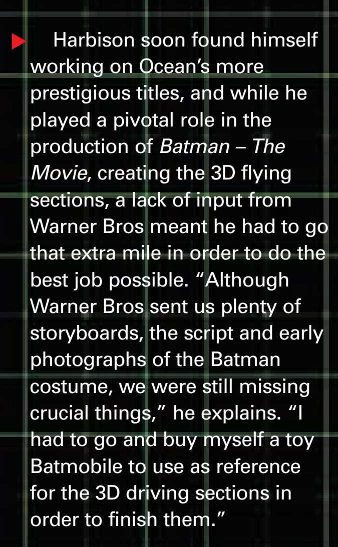
Were any games particularly hard to finish?
Not so much hard to finish, but it was more that you couldn't see when the end was. A couple of projects seemed to drag on and on, with *Silver* in particular taking an extremely long time to finish.



Did you work on any games that never saw the light of day?
Definitely. I think most developers at some point in their careers work on projects that never see the light of day for some reason or another. At Ocean I only really worked on a couple of prototype projects that ended up getting canned, although they were nothing worth mentioning if I'm really honest. Although during my time at Ocean, other teams had virtually completed *Green Lantern* for the SNES and *The Shadow* for the Mega Drive, and neither game ended up getting released.



What are you doing now?
I'm currently working for Gizmondo Studios and am creating games for the launch of its new Gizmondo handheld.



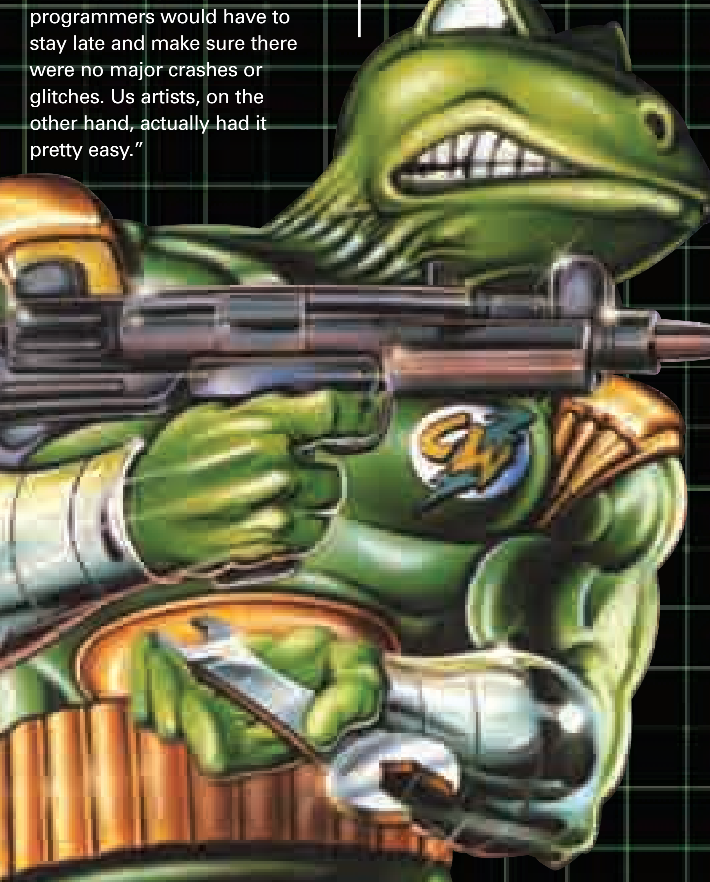
Harbison soon found himself working on Ocean's more prestigious titles, and while he played a pivotal role in the production of *Batman – The Movie*, creating the 3D flying sections, a lack of input from Warner Bros meant he had to go that extra mile in order to do the best job possible. "Although Warner Bros sent us plenty of storyboards, the script and early photographs of the Batman costume, we were still missing crucial things," he explains. "I had to go and buy myself a toy Batmobile to use as reference for the 3D driving sections in order to finish them."

TENSE TIMES

Considering the vast amount of money that was pumped into licences, Harbison found working on them relatively stress-free, although there was always the odd game that would cause a few problems. "*Total Recall* on the Commodore 64 was a particularly tense time," he recalls. "I think every artist in the building worked on that to get it out on time. Apart from *Total Recall*, though, I can't really remember any project causing particular problems. Obviously, when a game was nearing completion and the bug reports started to come in, the programmers would have to stay late and make sure there were no major crashes or glitches. Us artists, on the other hand, actually had it pretty easy."

Unsurprisingly, Ocean's development teams and project times were very different to modern working methods, with many of the Spectrum teams consisting of just three people – a programmer, an artist and someone to take care of the audio. "Early on, we were looking at an average of three months to start and finish both a Commodore 64 and Spectrum title," says Bracey. "One particularly difficult time was the conversion of *Wizball* on the Spectrum. The programmer at the time – one month from completion – stated he wanted X thousand pounds or he wouldn't finish the game. I won't go into how that one was resolved, though…"

Still, despite occasional disagreements, there was strong team spirit and a great deal of enthusiasm at Ocean. "The early days were hard, but very rewarding," says Bracey. "As a new entertainment industry, we made up the rules as we went along. Most of the people involved, especially in the development side, were still relatively young, so there was a great deal of energy. I know it's a



tired adage but we worked hard and played hard."

LOST TITLES

Inevitably, while plenty of big-name games did get released, there were more than a few titles that never got off the drawing board, or, even worse, were stopped mid-development. "There were quite a few that sunk without a trace, usually down to problems with licences or because the external teams weren't making a good job of the game," remembers Harbison. "The only one I wish I had managed to actually finish was an isometric *Simpsons* game that I was working on with Paul Hughes for the Amiga. It was looking really good but got shelved after Ocean bought the rights to convert a NES game called *Bart Vs The Space Mutants*."

Similarly, Gary Bracey was disappointed when a deal to produce *Lobo* (a popular comic book character) fell through, and he's still pained when he thinks about the game that *Jurassic Park* could have been (although it was still very good). "We had some great ideas for *Jurassic Park*, particularly on the PC and Amiga," he says. "The intention was to create a *Doom*-type game in 3D – bear in mind that this was pre-*Doom*. Sadly, timing just got the better of us and we had to reconfigure the design so that the development time would fit in better with the movie release. Bear in mind that this was a huge licence for us, as we had never paid a seven-figure guarantee for a licence before (neither had anyone else at the time) – so much was riding on it. In order to maximise the value, we really needed to release the game as closely to the movie release as possible."

NEW FRIENDS

Regardless of what people thought of its constant film and arcade tie-ins, Ocean was perfectly capable of publishing highly innovative software. Ironically, this was partly due to the success of the licensed titles. "It was the revenue earned from these types of mass-market games that generated money which allowed Ocean to invest in many more original games, such as those from Sensible Software, Jon Ritman and DID," says Bracey.

These original titles weren't always developed by in-house teams, but Ocean had a knack of surrounding itself with some of the best talent in the industry, and Bracey made sure that the partnerships always ran smoothly. "Jon Ritman was very much of the 'it'll be ready when it's ready' school, which is obviously frustrating when you are managing the project, but he always made it worth the wait," he says. "Denton Designs, on the other hand, constantly tried pushing the envelope in terms of innovation and originality. Sometimes it paid off, sometimes not. However, we always got along pretty well."

▶ Head and Heels were the brainchildren of Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond, and their game – *Head Over Heels* (funnily enough) – was a big hit for Ocean.

ALL IN ONE

While it was adept at attracting talented individuals and development teams, Ocean was also quick to capitalise on market trends. Following the success of the *Soft Aid* compilation (released to support Band Aid), David Ward and Jon Woods realised that gamers were prepared to pay again for old titles. In 1985, Ocean's first compilation, *They Sold A Million*, was released. Containing Ocean's *Daley Thompson's Decathlon*, US Gold's *Beach Head*, Software Projects' *Jet Set Willy* and Ultimate's *Sabre Wulf*, the project proved very lucrative for all involved. "Ocean licensed the other titles from the original publishers," explains Bracey about the inclusion of key non-Ocean titles. "Bear in mind that this was an opportunity for a 'second bite of the cherry', which had previously not existed. Being part of such a prestigious compilation was potentially very lucrative." It was a deal that paid off handsomely and Ocean was soon churning out compilations at an

astonishing rate, with bold flashy titles like *The Magnificent 7*, *100% Dynamite* and *2 Hot 2 Handle*. These packs were attractive to the consumer and proved a great way to extend a game's longevity. "Capturing the secondary market was important and it became increasingly more critical in later years when the shelf-life of most games was just a couple of weeks," says Bracey. "The format would probably work today, but I think the secondary market is now dominated by budget titles, a concept which works equally well."

BRAND BUYOUT

For all its early success, Ocean was eventually bought by Infogrames (now trading as Atari) in 1996. While rumours abound of spiralling debt problems (rumours that remain unsubstantiated), one particular tale has been laid to rest by Bracey. Some theories say that *Robocop 3* was one of the main culprits behind Ocean's downfall; it was alleged that Ocean spent a fortune on copy protection for it, which was then immediately cracked, leading to massive losses for the publisher.

"It's an urban myth, I'm afraid," reveals Bracey. "Piracy was rife and we were offered a new, dongle-based security system that would (allegedly) prevent copying. I saw it more as a deterrent to the casual/playground copier than the more hardcore hacker. There was a price to the dongles that made the manufacturing cost of the game a little more than normal. But as for leading to financial problems? It really is complete nonsense – not only that, it isn't even slightly true. Ocean had no financial problems at that time. Still, I guess it makes for a nice story though."

Although Infogrames initially kept the Manchester offices open, for development and Q&A (Infogrames Q&A is still based there), the development studio was moved to Sheffield and relocated at Gremlin's old offices (Infogrames bought Gremlin in 1999). Shortly after that, the Ocean name was dropped and a great era in gaming came to a close. It was a sad end to an established brand, and it's surprising that Infogrames never kept the name going.

It's a decision that confuses Bracey. "I don't know why it didn't maintain the Ocean brand, which I think was very upsetting to everyone who had been involved with the company over the years," he admits. "There was a great deal of pride when you told people you worked for Ocean and it was sad to see the brand abandoned."

NET LIFE

While the brand may be no more, its spirit lives on at Will Harbison's excellent website, The Ocean Experience. It's sparked a massive amount of interest among fans and has become a regular haunt for many of Ocean's former staff.

AN INTERVIEW WITH JONATHAN SMITH

Time at Ocean: Three years (1984-87)
Job title: Games programmer
Selected Softography: *Hyper Sports, Cobra, Firefly, Midnight Resistance, Daley Thompson's Super Test*

What was your time at Ocean like?
It was daunting at first. Being a games programmer meant doing anything from game programming to drawing graphics, doing the sound effects and music, and even writing the inlay instructions. It was also quite a competitive atmosphere where all the programmers tried to technically impress and outdo each other – in the nicest possible way, of course.



You worked on quite a few arcade and film licences. What sort of problems did these present?
The arcade conversions were easy as you had a definitive design to work from. Sadly, the ZX Spectrum was always problematic, compared to, say, the Commodore 64, as it didn't have any hardware. In a way this worked to your advantage, as you had to be more inventive in a way that other programmers on 'better' formats didn't need to be. The film licences all ended up being the 'Ocean Scrolling Platform Game™'. I tried to do something slightly different with the design for *Red Heat* but failed miserably – please forgive me?

What was it like working on big licences like *Batman*?
Working on *Batman* sounds like a dream come true but in reality was a bit of a nightmare. DC Comics had strict rules and regulations – pages of them – which had to be adhered to. The game design had to be constantly submitted for approval, changed, then re-submitted and all the while the deadline clock was ticking away. You had teams of people developing parts of a game that might have to be radically changed or disregarded completely.

***Midnight Resistance* must have been a difficult game to convert. Were there any problems with it?**
All the sprite graphics were pulled from the arcade ROMs and because of the sensible way the developers had laid out the palettes it was an easy task to convert them to all the formats, although the background graphics and maps were all done from scratch for some reason. Fast horizontal scrolling on an Atari ST was always going to be difficult so I didn't bother, opting for a 'block shift' technique instead. Lack of time and money meant that scrolling levels weren't possible.



Are there any interesting stories you can tell us about your time at Ocean?
Not without putting my foot in it – I've already got into loads of trouble for kissing and telling! I even had to have my words struck from a website interview I did a few years back…

"The website was originally just a place for me to show some old articles that I'd saved, and some of the photos and cartoons I'd drawn while working at Ocean," explains Harbison, clearly pleased with the site's success. "I only started work back on the site in January after an absence of about three years; since then it's just exploded. Old work colleagues are constantly getting back in touch and sending me stuff to put on the website – it's becoming an Ocean shrine."

Indeed, the likes of Bracey, Simon Butler, John Lomax and Jon Dunn are just a few of the staff who you'll find reminiscing about the good old days and sharing valuable nuggets of information about the company, and it's obvious that working for Ocean has affected them greatly. "There's a real nostalgia trip happening which is great to see," says Harbison. "Another great plus is that there are loads of people on the site who just enjoyed playing the games, which is always a treat."

FULL CIRCLE

Though many former Ocean employees have moved away from Manchester, Harbison is still there, and is currently making mobile titles for Rockpool Games. "It's a bit like the old days with quite short projects on a variety of different subjects," he says of the similarities between now and the Ocean era. He also likes to help out at retro-remake website Retrospec whenever he has the chance, although his spare time is becoming a thing of the past.

Ocean may have gone, but it still haunts the retro-gaming community, and Harbison seems to be inexplicably linked to the restless spirit. "It's very weird, but I'll soon be moving premises to an office that I used to work in while I was at Ocean," he says. "It's certainly funny how these things come full circle sometimes."

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT OCEAN, VISIT THE OCEAN EXPERIENCE AT...

HTTP://THEOCEANEXPERIENCE.CO.UK

OCEAN BOX OFFICE BOMBS

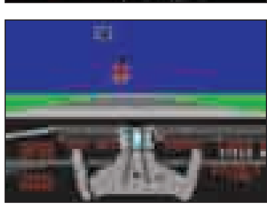
CONSIDERING THE VAST AMOUNT OF GAMES THAT OCEAN RELEASED, IT WAS INEVITABLE THAT SOME OF THEM WEREN'T EXACTLY CLASSICS. COVERING OUR NOSES WITH THE STRONGEST OF PEGS, WE GET DOWN AND DIRTY AND LOOK AT SOME OF OCEAN'S BIGGEST MIS-HITS

KNIGHT RIDER

Released: 1986
Genre: Shoot-'em-up
Team: Antony R Lill, Gary Knight, F David Thorpe
Tie-in with: Universal TV series

Gamers had to wait over a year for the arrival of Ocean's *Knight Rider* but, sadly, it wasn't worth their time. Dull level design, god-awful controls and incredibly ropey visuals meant that *Knight Rider* was one of Ocean's biggest turkeys. Avoid like the plagueiest plague.

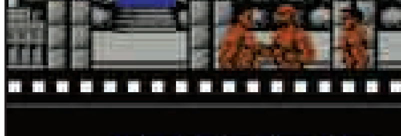




RED HEAT

Released: 1989
Genre: Beat-'em-up
Team: Special FX Software
Tie-in with: Carolco Pictures movie

Ocean managed to take monotony to new levels by creating one of the dullest games we've ever had the misfortune to play. Constantly punch enemies as they shuffle towards you and, er, that's about it. Even the mini-games were abysmal.

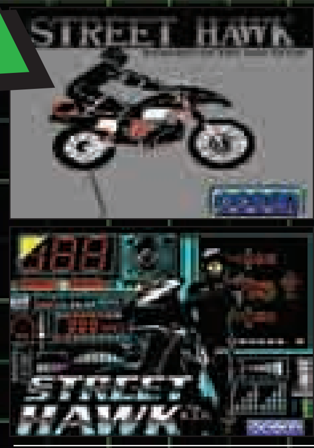


RED HEAT

STREET HAWK

Released: 1986
Genre: Arcade action
Team: Paul Owens, F David Thorpe, H Nuandsyz
Tie-in with: Universal TV series

Bizarrely based on *Defender*, of all things, *Street Hawk* saw you shooting down helicopters and rescuing the survivors. It may have featured some reasonably impressive flicker-free visuals, but the controls and gameplay were simply horrible. Another spectacular waste of a licence.

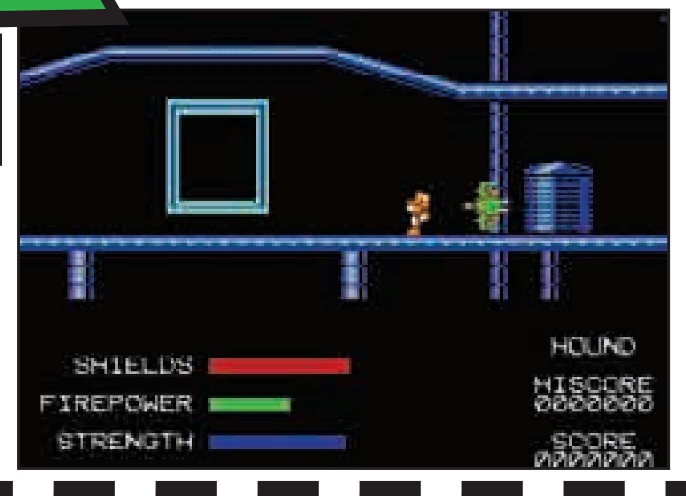


▲ Don't be tempted to dig this one up – trust us, it really is pretty poor.

TRANSFORMERS

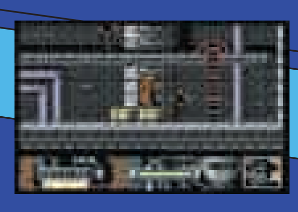
Released: 1986
Genre: Platform
Team: Denton Designs
Tie-in with: Hasbro Industries toy brand

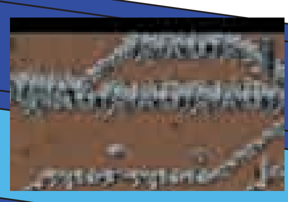
Considering the past collaborations between Denton Designs and Ocean, *Transformers* was quite a surprise – and not in a good way. Poorly designed sprites, simple animation and horrible colour clash weren't helped by unresponsive controls and dull gameplay. And the vital transformations were rubbish.

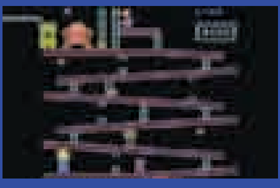


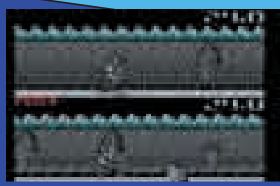
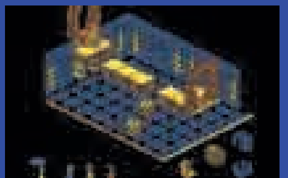
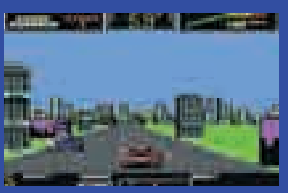
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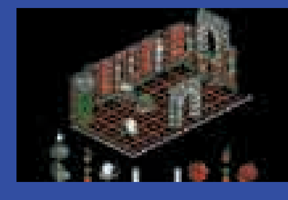




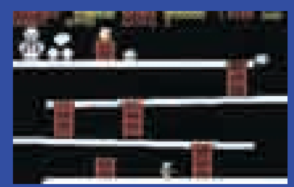


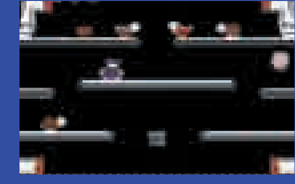
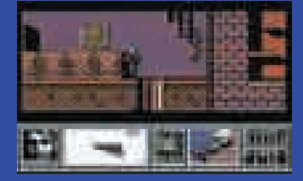
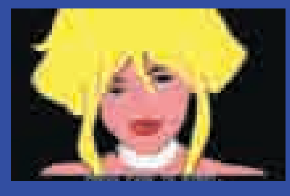


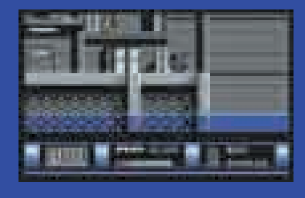
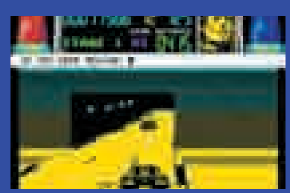
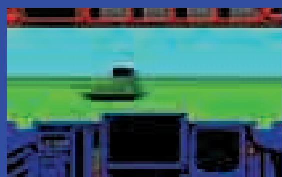
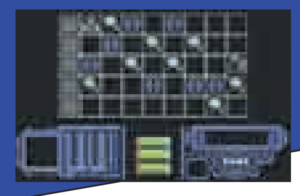





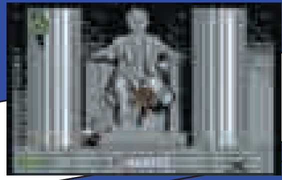


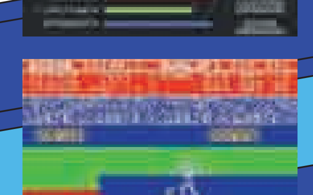
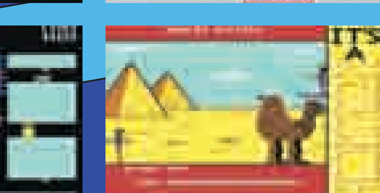
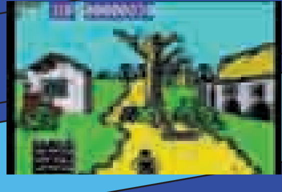


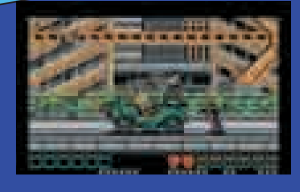


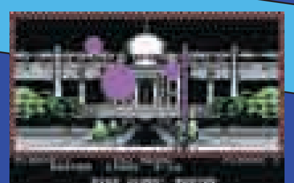
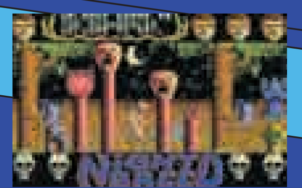


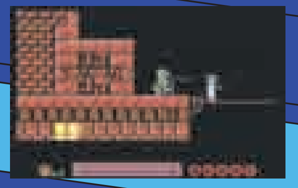
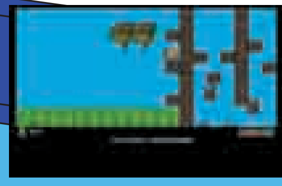
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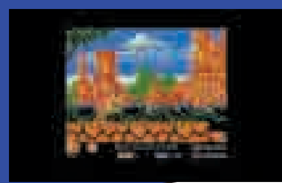




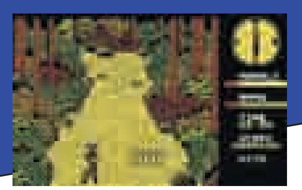


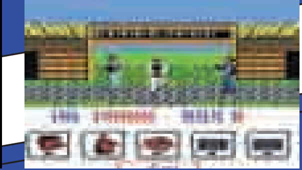
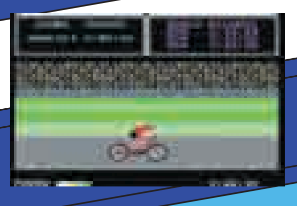
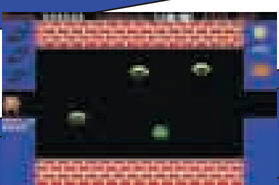






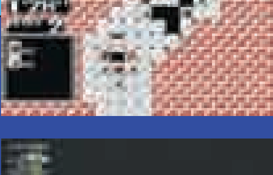




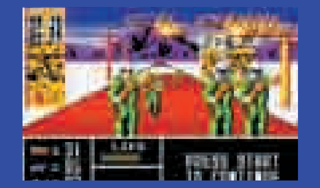




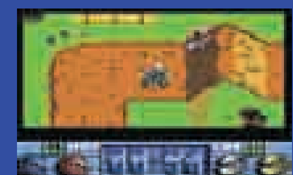




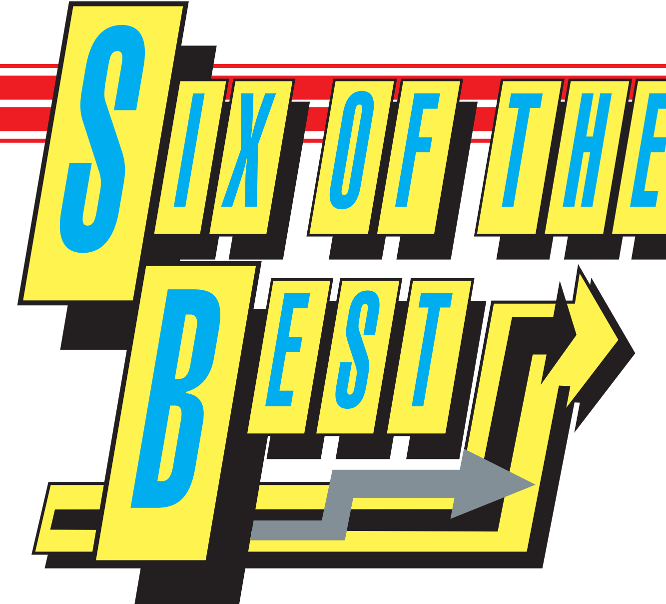












OCEAN WAS OFTEN CRITICISED FOR THE HEAPS OF ARCADE AND FILM LICENCES THAT IT CHURNED OUT, BUT IT WAS MORE THAN CAPABLE OF PUBLISHING GREAT GAMES WHEN IT WANTED TO. AND AS THESE SIX TITLES SHOW, SOME OF THEM WERE VERY GOOD INDEED...

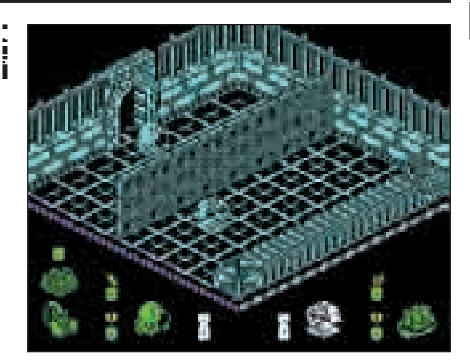


HEAD OVER HEELS

DEVELOPER: JON RITMAN/BERNIE DRUMMOND RELEASE: 1987 FORMAT: VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

Showered with praise upon its release, *Head Over Heels* saw you taking control of two spies who had to overthrow an evil dictatorship that ruled five planets. The game started off with both spies in prison and your first aim was to escape. Fortunately, both Head and Heels had unique characteristics that made your task slightly easier; Head could jump twice his height and glide for short distances, while Heels used his giant feet to move incredibly fast. Once the two friends had been reunited, it was possible to join them together and exploit their combined skills.

Unlike today's games that often feature pointless tutorials, *Head Over Heels*' opening was a far from easy ride that demanded instant concentration and lateral thinking. Honing the skills that he'd put to such good use in *Batman* (also by Ocean) Jon Ritman pulled out all the stops to create some of the most devilish rooms the puzzle genre had seen.



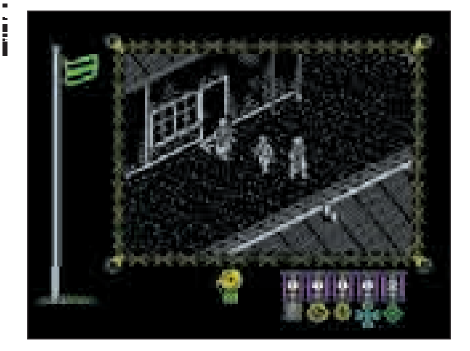
Featuring beautifully animated sprites, a wonderfully bizarre sense of humour (check out the Prince Charles head) and some fantastically designed puzzles, *Head Over Heels* remains an essential 8-bit classic and is arguably Ritman and Drummond's finest hour.

THE GREAT ESCAPE

DEVELOPER: DENTON DESIGNS RELEASE: 1986 FORMAT: VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

Perhaps the most astonishing fact about Denton Designs' *The Great Escape* is that it was released 16 years before Codemasters' *Prisoner Of War* and is still the better game. Set in a German prison camp at the end of World War II, the game saw you playing a POW who's planning to pull off the titular Great Escape. What made this game so fun was the way it sucked you into your surroundings and refused to let go. Players who wanted a quick fix and rushed around the camp in a bid to escape would invariably end up disappointed, as your escape needed to be meticulously planned.

Due to your strict confinement, each day saw you having to take part in the day-to-day activities of prison life, although you could always sneak away when the guards weren't looking. Once you'd learned the routines and worked out where guards were stationed it was time to put your plan into action.



Using an isometric viewpoint, *The Great Escape* has aged surprisingly well (even if it does feel rather slow-paced now). The absorbing gameplay is still apparent and the jaunty theme tune will bring a tear of nostalgia to your eye.

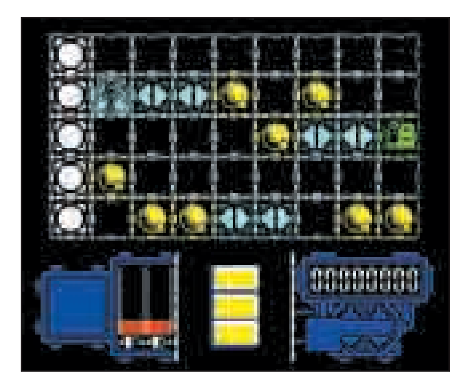
FIREFLY

DEVELOPER: SPECIAL FX SOFTWARE LTD RELEASE: 1988 FORMAT: VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

Created by one of Ocean's in-house software teams, *Firefly* was a superb blend of frantic blasting and strategic gameplay that tested your reflexes to the max. The idea of the game was to move across a simple grid in order to reach the power source on the other side. Your Firefly aircraft could move one square at a time and careful planning was needed in order to find the safest route across the board. Certain squares were unaccessible, while others could were captured by completing a simple mini-game. The majority of the squares, however, were empty. Land on one of these and you were instantly transported to a nearby planet's surface, a hostile environment that was swarming with enemies.

Before you could return to the main grid, you had to fly around each stage and destroy the level's four energy points (no mean feat, as you had to collect four energy units first). While early levels were fairly simple to navigate, they became increasingly complex. Before long you'd be flying through treacherous mazes that were swarming with opponents that had to be avoided or destroyed.

It was *Firefly*'s distinctive gameplay and superlative visuals that set it apart from many similar games, and while it's now starting to look a little rough around the edges, its magic is still easy to see.



TAI-PAN

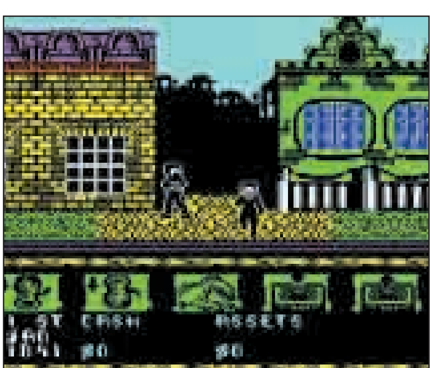
DEVELOPER: SENTIENT SOFTWARE LTD
RELEASE: 1998 FORMAT: VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

Few trading games were able to match the scope of Elite, but Sentient Software's *Tai-Pan* proved to be a welcome alternative to David Braben and Ian Bell's space odyssey. Set in the Far East, you started off as the penniless Dirk Struan and had to amass a fortune as quickly as possible in order to earn the coveted title of Tai-Pan. After securing a loan for $300,000 you were able to buy a ship, recruit a (hopefully) worthy crew and set sail on the high seas.

Unsurprisingly, sailing around from town to town created its own problems and you needed to quickly master the game's various icons in order to safely reach your next port of call. And if you didn't feed the crew regularly they'd become mutinous or even develop scurvy. Combat could also be a tricky proposition, as wiping out an entire enemy crew meant that it was impossible to capture their ship and steer it to port.

It was this constant gauging of choices that made *Tai-Pan* so engaging and still makes it accessible today. Sure, it features some hideous colour clash and poorly animated sprites, but once you ignore the cheap aesthetics you'll find an incredibly absorbing game that gives you a staggering amount of choice.

▼ Enjoy some epic trading adventures but without the space travel.



MATCH DAY 2

DEVELOPER: JON RITMAN/BERNIE DRUMMOND RELEASE: 1987 FORMAT: VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

Before *Sensible Soccer, Kick-Off, FIFA Football* and *Pro Evolution Soccer*, football fanatics were only interested in one game – *Match Day 2*. After raising the bar with *Match Day*, Jon Ritman and Bernie Drummond returned with a sequel that not only proved that they listened to criticism, but also made huge improvements on the original game in every area possible. There may have been 17 menus to negotiate, but working your way through them was incredibly intuitive and allowed you access to a huge range of game options.

But it was the main game where Ritman had really excelled, and while initial play gave the impression of a simple update, *Match Day 2*'s depth quickly became obvious. This was due in part to the newly implemented 'Kickometer'. It may have taken a while to master, but the variety of shots you could pull off with it was astonishing. Volleys, punts, back heels and powerful blasts could all be executed with ease and added a new dimension to *Match Day*'s already solid gameplay.



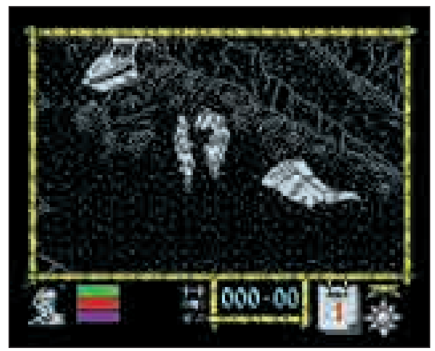
▲ The curious luminosity of the pitch never came into question.

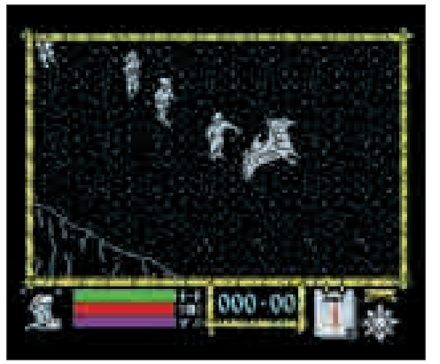
The deflection problems from the first game had also been ironed out and the newly implemented Diamond Deflection System meant that balls bounced off characters in a much more realistic manner. *Match Day 2* may be archaic by today's standards (proof of how far the genre has progressed) but in its time it was simply unbeatable. Back of the net.

WHERE TIME STOOD STILL

DEVELOPER: DENTON DESIGNS RELEASE: 1986 FORMAT: VARIOUS HOME SYSTEMS

▼ Aeroplanes and pterodactyls? Gotta love the anachronism.





Like *The Great Escape* (also by Denton Designs), *Where Time Stood Still* is another excellent 8-bit title that masterfully draws you in to its atmospheric world. Similar in design to *The Great Escape*, *Where Time Stood Still* looked better, featured a more complex menu system and allowed you to control four characters (though never at the same time).

After crash landing on the Lost Plateau, pilot Jarret certainly had his work cut out and had to get plump businessman Clive, Clive's daughter Gloria and her fiancé Dirk to safety before they were eaten by the dinosaurs and cannibals that prowled the dangerous landscape.

Although this appeared to be yet another generic isometric adventure, it had plenty of features to ensure it stood out. One of the biggest improvements was the excellent menu system that enabled each character to carry a whopping four items (doesn't sound like much, but that was a lot back in 1986). The detailed visuals, superb looking dinosaurs and challenging gameplay (it wasn't easy negotiating the treacherous terrain) ensured that *Where Time Stood Still* became an instant hit with all who played it. Like *The Great Escape*, it's showing it's age now – you've got to love that jerky scrolling – but the absorbing gameplay is just as apparent now as it was 19 years ago.



O·P·E·R·A·T·I·O·N W·O·L·F

As gaming infiltrated the home market a new breed of gamer evolved. Dubbed the 'fanboy', he associated himself with a certain genre, machine or even developer or publisher, and then ridiculed all that opposed him. First recorded in playgrounds in the early Eighties, typical arguments revolved around who had the better machine, or which game looked best on which format. We aim to put a stop to years of squabbling by finding the definitive versions of some classic titles. This month, the 8-bit computer versions of the superb Taito hit *Operation Wolf* go head to head…

ROUND 1: VISUALS

COMMODORE 64: The C64's blocky sprites are infamous among retro gamers, but even we were shocked at what we saw here. Time has not been kind to this version of *Operation Wolf*. Ugly Lego-like men lurch around each level and have little in common with the sprites from the original game. Disappointing to say the least.

SPECTRUM: *Operation Wolf* on the Spectrum suffers from the old monochrome problem that plagues so many other Speccy titles. While the sprites are well detailed (especially the vehicles), smaller ones often get lost in the background, and can be hard to kill. A decent enough conversion that's ruined by dull looks.

AMSTRAD: This is more like it. Well-animated sprites (that don't look as if they were made by a six-year-old) and colourful backgrounds all combine to make a very swish-looking title. Out of the three 8-bit conversions, the CPC one looks most like its arcade parent – a great effort.

WINNER: AMSTRAD
RUNNER UP: C64

ROUND 2: AUDIO

COMMODORE 64: The C64 is always a strong performer in this category and *Operation Wolf* is no exception. Jonathan Dunn's remix of the original arcade tune is superb and really gets your trigger finger itching. The in-game spot effects are fairly basic, but this can be said for all three versions. The hands-down winner.

SPECTRUM: The Spectrum's sound chip once again lets it down and while the theme tune is fairly accurate it lacks the oomph that makes the Amstrad and C64 versions so enjoyable to listen to. The in-game sound effects are also poor, meaning that the Spectrum comes in far behind its competitors.

AMSTRAD: What we have here is a decent rendition of the *Operation Wolf* theme tune that's not only instantly recognisable but sounds the business as well. It's not as funky as the C64 outing, but it's a very strong effort and definitely gets you in the mood for gunplay.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD

ROUND 3: GAMEPLAY

COMMODORE 64: The C64 scores easy points as it features a variety of play options, including mouse support. This makes aiming extremely responsive and gives you tighter control. The downside is that the game moves rather sluggishly, which takes away some of the frantic gunplay that made the arcade title so good.

SPECTRUM: Although the Spectrum has a variety of control options, the visuals make this a lot harder to play. Items like grenades can be hard to spot against the monochrome background and you'll often find yourself missing valuable ammo. This is a shame as this is a strong effort that deserves to be played.

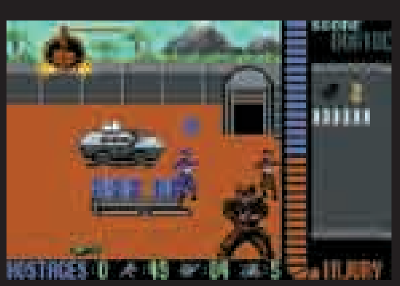
AMSTRAD: Although the Amstrad lacks the C64's mouse use, it makes up for this with speedy scrolling, solid controls and decent gameplay. While this is a much more accurate conversion in terms of visuals and feel, the C64's variety of controls tips the scales in its favour.

WINNER: C64
RUNNER UP: AMSTRAD



C64

Never mind that it has some rather questionable graphics and that certain key scenes – like the hostage at the end of the second level – are missing (a problem affecting all three versions of the game). Simply embrace the fact that the C64 has another strong arcade conversion to boast about and one more notch on the Clash Of The Titans scoreboard.



The C64 version may not look the best, but it plays like a dream.



Alas, green and black graphics impede bullet-based action.





OPERATION WOLF (Various Home Systems) Ocean, 1988 – UK Advertisement



WIZBALL

FORGET PAUL DANIELS AND WIZBIT – THIS WAS THE ONLY WIZARD WORTH KNOWING

Format: C64, various home systems
Release: 1987
Publisher: Ocean
Developer: Sensible Software

Few games are ever considered perfect, but as far as Commodore 64 owners were concerned the wonderful *Wizball* certainly came very close. Created by Chris Yates and Jon Hare (with musical support from Martin Galway), *Wizball* was a highly innovative combination of frantic shooting and fast thinking that saw you having to restore colour to the drab world of Wizworld.

Thanks to the evil wizard Zark, all the colour in Wizworld had been drained away, leaving behind a dull, desolate landscape. Eager to return his planet to its former glory, Wiz and his cat Nifta (named after Yates' pet moggy) set about blasting enemies and collecting the drops of colour they left behind.

The titular Wizball was a device used by Wiz to negotiate Wizworld's treacherous terrain. It started off with extremely basic controls – all you could do was bounce either left or right and fire at enemies – but shooting certain opponents left behind power orbs, which would then highlight a row of icons at the top of the screen. One quick waggle of the joystick later and you'd gain the abilities of whichever power had been selected. Skills allowed you to control your Wizball more fully, fire lasers and bullets in all directions, and, most importantly, gain control of Nifta's Catellite – a handy device that allowed you to pick up droplets of colour from vanquished enemies by holding down the fire button. As the droplets were collected they'd fill up one of four cauldrons; once a cauldron had been filled, you'd restore a small portion of colour back to Wizworld.

It might sound unusual, but you'll be surprised at how familiar this game feels to play. Indeed, *Wizball* shares many similarities with blasters like *Gradius* and, as Jon Hare explains, influences from Konami's classic game feature quite prominently throughout *Wizball*'s design. "*Wizball* came from a control system that Chris put together just after we finished working on *Parallax*," recalls Hare. "Initially, I remember working on an underground adventure part of the game too, although that eventually got scrapped, only to resurface in a different guise later on in *Wizkid*. We were also playing a lot of the coin-op *Gradius* at the time and a lot of the enemies, weapons and wave forms were inspired by it."

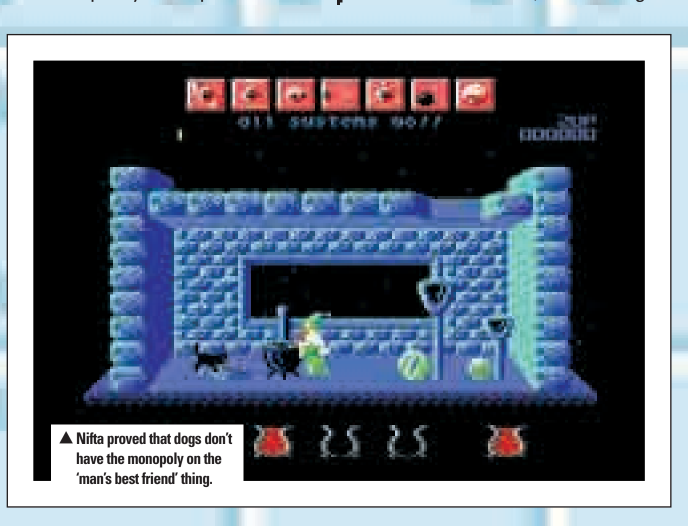
Although *Wizball* may have had a lot in common with Konami's shooter, it still had plenty of unique features to carve out an important niche for itself. This in part came down to Yates and Hare having to work around the C64's limitations. "The background colouring idea came out of the colour restrictions imposed by the C64," says Hare. "As I was messing around with the graphics, we worked out that the different colour combinations looked interesting and the logical progression of colouring in the world as a game mechanic idea spilled out of that. From this we then needed a method to collect the colours in order to colour in the world, and creating



IZZY WIZZY, LET'S GET BUSY

These days you'll often hear complaints that games – particularly sequels – are churned out too quickly, meaning we get shoddy titles and the publisher makes a quick buck. However, Jon Hare, Chris Yates and Martin Galway proved that working fast doesn't mean cutting corners.

"We started *Wizball* in November 1986 and it was ready for release in May 1987, so all in all, it took us about five months," recalls Hare. "Of course, we were allowing for Christmas and the development of *Galax-i-birds* in the middle of it, so everything went pretty well. It was also incredibly easy to get it published, as we had just done *Parallax* with Ocean, they liked it and wanted our next game as well. I don't think they even cared what it was because they trusted our ability to originate both creatively and technically – and anyway, they paid very little money for it in any case. We never did get our royalty payments…"



▲ Nifta proved that dogs don't have the monopoly on the 'man's best friend' thing.


▲ There goes Wiz in globular form, off to bring a little colour to the Wizworld.



the Catellite to collect the different colour droplets from various enemies seemed like the logical choice."

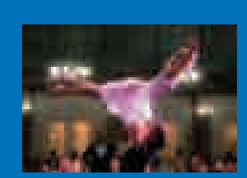
The working relationship between Yates and Hare also helped turn *Wizball* into something extraordinary. "Chris and I were a very creative partnership, particularly in the C64 times when mainly it was just the two of us," says Hare. "We did everything by inspiration and perfection of ideas; our communication was so good in a way that it's impossible to recreate in larger teams. Every day at work something new and great was created. Looking back it was like alchemy, a very special time."

One of the most memorable aspects of *Wizball* is its unique graphical style. As you master Nifta's Catellite abilities and collect more droplets of colour, the levels slowly start to come back to life with a vibrancy not often seen in C64 titles. Once again, it was the limitations of the 8-bit machine that gave *Wizball* such a distinctive look. "The game mechanic of colouring in was designed around the C64s graphical limitations and character construction being restricted to four colours from a palette of 16," explains Hare. "So the backgrounds were very much constructed with this in mind, hence their 'unique' look. Aside from Wizball himself the sprites were mainly derived directly from twisted arcade machine-style graphics, although I guess Nifta was pretty unusual in those days too."

Apart from the distinctive looks and innovative ideas, it's the gameplay in *Wizball* that remains most enduring. It's certainly not an easy game by any stretch of the imagination, but thanks to the perfectly balanced difficulty curve you'll soon find that controlling Wizball and the Catellite sidekick becomes second nature.

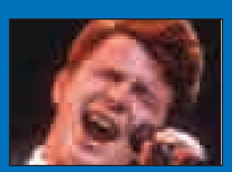
While many consider *Wizball* to be a simple all-out shooter, it soon reveals a depth that's not commonly associated with the genre (especially in the 8-bit days) – and that's before you even get to the excellent co-op mode. It may have appeared on several other systems, including the Spectrum, Amiga and Amstrad, but to many, *Wizball* is and always will be a defining game for the C64. Now that's magic.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF 1987



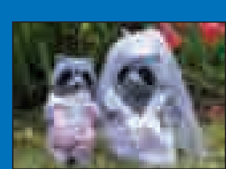
AT THE MOVIES

Once upon a time, Patrick Swayze was considered a box-office draw. *Dirty Dancing* not only sealed his A-list reputation, but also gave us the immortal line, "nobody leaves baby in the corner." Classic stuff.



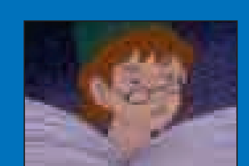
ON THE RADIO

Stock, Aitken and Waterman promoted Rick Astley from tea boy to number-one star after penning him several bland but curiously popular songs like *Never Gonna Give You Up* and *Together Forever*.



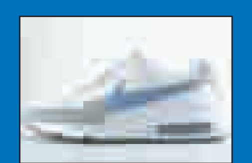
TOP TOY

The cuddly Sylvanian Families were a massive hit in '87 and still have kids occupied today. The concept of having families based around everyday animals has definitely proved enduring, even if those furry faces do look rather sinister…



CARTOON HEROES

This was the last year on air for the excellent *Dungeons & Dragons*. Forget the fact that Bobby the Barbarian was always crying or that Uni was the most annoying character ever created, and just remember how hard Venger was.



FASHION VICTIM

Thanks to some clever advertising and great design, Nike's Air trainers became incredibly popular. We're not sure if the gas-filled heel actually made you jump higher; it certainly didn't help some hapless owners run away from shoe muggers.

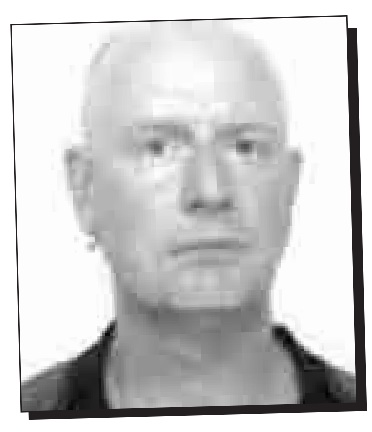


▲ *Wizball* appeared on other systems, like the Amiga, but still shines on the C64.

SIMON BUTLER

When you've been in the industry as long as Simon Butler it's inevitable that you'll have made a lot of friends, a few enemies and, above all, lots of games. We had a chat with a man who's been a staffer, a freelancer and who's designed more games than we've had hot dinners. And we've had a lot of hot dinners...

interviewed by DARRAN JONES



Simon Butler is a man who's used to change. Over the past 20 years he's worked on a variety of gaming systems, witnessed the birth of 3D graphics and firmly entrenched himself within the booming mobile phone industry. The 47-year-old Liverpudlian doesn't mince words, has had both good and bad times in the industry, and continues to make as many 2D titles as possible. And like many industry figures, it all started with a little game called *Pong*...

After endlessly playing his friend's copy, Butler found himself frequenting the local arcades playing anything and everything he could afford to feed coins into. A keen artist with designs on working in advertising, Butler's main choice of career was placed on hold when he got work at Imagine on *Pedro's Garden*. Admittedly, that gig only lasted three days and Butler went back to Liverpool Polytechnic to finish his degree. But once he'd graduated and moved to London to pursue that advertising career in the mid-Eighties he found it hard to find reliable full-time employment. Fortunately, a phone call that solved his lack of work.

"I got this call from an old friend, Steve Cain, who I had known since my teens and who had recommended me for the *Pedro's Garden* job," recalls Butler. "He told me that Imagine had gone bust and that he and several other ex-Imagine employees had set up a new team called Denton Designs. He offered me a place and I accepted, thinking it would be a short-term fix to the employment problem and that eventually I would go back to my chosen career in advertising. Twenty-one years later and I still haven't returned."

Butler was set to work designing titles such as *Shadowfire*, *Enigma Force*, *Cosmic WarToads* and *Transformers*, though he eventually decided to move on from Denton Designs. He started freelancing for Ocean and began an on/off relationship with the publisher that lasted for several years. "My first introduction to Ocean was when I was working for a company called Canvas that was an external developer for Ocean," Butler says. "Sadly, it began to produce product that was shoddier with each release, so I got disillusioned and left. I had no plans beyond walking out of the door, but the following day I received a call from Gary Bracey [Ocean's development director] asking me to go to Ocean for an interview. Fortunately for me, he hired me and I stayed until I got itchy feet and wanted to move into 16-bit games."

STRIKING OUT

During his time at Ocean, Butler worked on an impressive amount of titles, which inevitably included quite a few film licences, and as he explains, they weren't always enjoyable to make. "Movie licences, while being a perfect cash cow for the publisher, are the bane of any developer's life," he explains. "You know right from the get-go that people are going to judge it unfairly – a Spectrum game against a multi-million-dollar blockbuster with state-of-the-art effects. However, you do the best you can, attempting to capture some of the flavour of the film, even if you cannot truly capture the excitement and impact of the movie itself."

But there weren't just nit-picking gamers to contend with when making licensed titles, and the pressure was on from all sides. "The movie studios at first, because they didn't understand the games industry, were a trifle annoying with questions like, 'Why doesn't it look like Arnold Schwarzenegger?'," Butler says. "They didn't understand the limitations of the machines and they had to be walked through the process until daylight finally dawned. Sadly, the most limiting aspect of the licensed games was that it stifled any originality you might have attempted to put into them, and this was something that the press jumped all over Ocean for at the time, accusing us of being stale and tired with little or no new ideas."

Though he's worked in-house at a number of companies, Butler still enjoys the flexibility that freelance work offers and has flitted between the two for the last two decades, although he admits it can be a double-edged sword. "Freelancing means that I don't find myself surrounded by the industry halfwits who annoy me so much," he begins. "I don't have to deal with those stupid children who think that what they're developing is going to set the world on fire, or that their latest idea is actually new and original. It also frees me from the coders with their holier-than-thou attitudes and the producers who are, in my opinion, no better than trained monkeys. However, it also forces you to spend

"FREELANCING FREES ME FROM THE CODERS WITH THEIR HOLIER-THAN-THOU ATTITUDES AND THE PRODUCERS WHO ARE, IN MY OPINION, NO BETTER THAN TRAINED MONKEYS"



▲ Shoot your own helicopter with your very own Jeep-mounted rockets in *Army Moves*.

"MOVIE LICENCES MAKE MONEY BUT ARE THE BANE OF ANY DEVELOPER'S LIFE"

all your time alone, which gets tiresome after a while and sometimes it's a dreadful temptation to spend time you can ill afford with the family or friends."

While Butler left Ocean in order to work on 16-bit titles, the transition from 8-bit to 16-bit (and, more importantly, 2D to 3D) wasn't without its problems. "The 2D/3D split did cause a problem for a while with me being predominantly 2D, but there is still a need for 2D graphics so I bumbled along in one role or another in a variety of 3D houses. I worked on textures and built environments; I coped. I'm not quite the total 3D-hater that I used to be, but I just haven't worked long enough in 3D to stay there and I keep getting called back to do 2D work."

These days Butler can be found hard at work on the latest mobile phone games (although he's also involved with the occasional DS or GBA title) and has now worked on over 100 mobile titles, even though he believes "the handheld market is in an appalling condition at the moment."

But despite the fact he's had – and still has – plenty of gripes with the industry, it doesn't look like Butler will be changing career any time soon, contrary to what his dad always told him. "He always wanted me to do one thing when he was alive – get a proper job…"

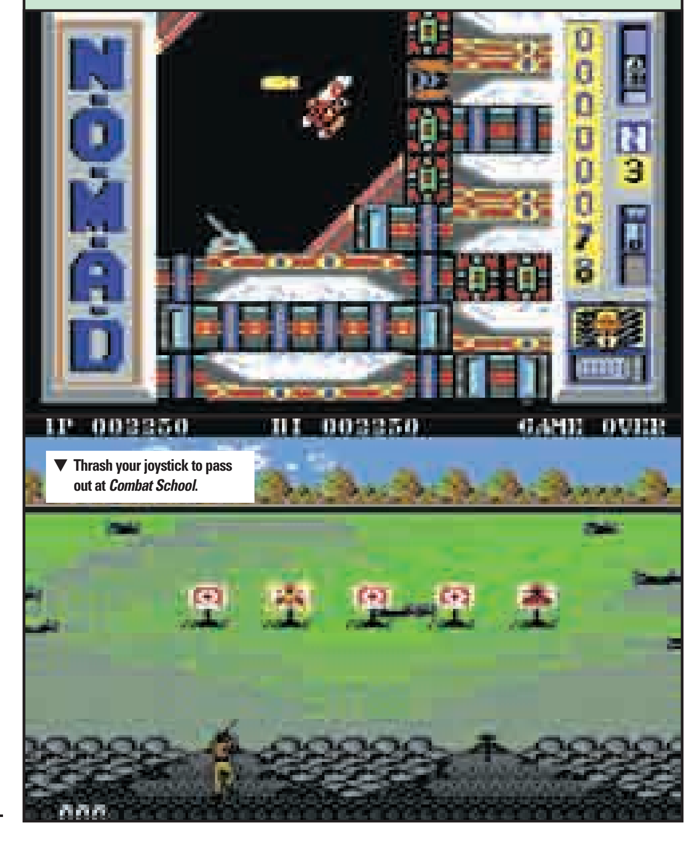
▼ *Target Renegade* highlighted the seedier side of life down at your local NCP.



SELECTED SOFTOGRAPHY (DESIGN)

From Imagine to independence, Simon Butler has worked on too many titles for us to list here. Some have been classics, some, um, aren't really classic per se…

- Gift From The Gods .... Spectrum, 1984
- Shadow Fire Spectrum/C64, 1985
- Enigma Force .... Spectrum, 1985
- N.O.M.A.D. Spectrum/C64, 1986
- Legend Of Kage Spectrum/C64, 1987
- Combat School C64, 1987
- Army Moves .... Amiga, 1988
- Target Renegade .... Spectrum, 1990
- Viz: The Game .... Spectrum, 1991
- Elf .... Amiga, 1991
- The Addams Family .... Amiga, 1992
- NBA 2000 .... GBC, 2000
- Lego Island 2 .... GBA, 2001



▼ Thrash your joystick to pass out at *Combat School*.



Share your views about old-school gaming

Retro Contact

First Contact

If you're into retro gaming and you've got something to share with the world, why not write to us at: games™ Retro, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, Dorset, BH1 2JS Or you can email: gamestm@paragon.co.uk

SUPER SNAKE

Dear games™

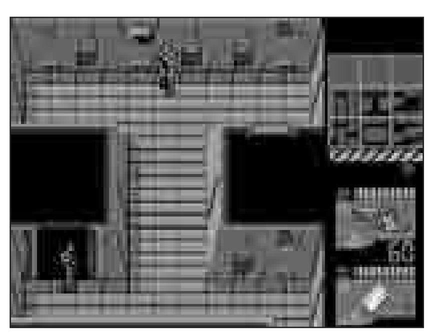
I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed reading the 'Precious Metal' article in issue 28. I'm a huge fan of the *Metal Gear Solid* games and while I knew that Snake had appeared on the NES, it's the first time I've heard about the MSX titles.

Once I'd finished reading through the feature I went straight to the internet, downloaded the *Metal Gear* ROMS and found myself a MSX emulator to play them on. What can I say? They are absolutely fantastic. I'm currently halfway through *Metal Gear* and am gobsmacked at the amount of detail Kojima was able to put into the game. It's even made me look for more MSX ROMs to play and many of the arcade conversions are absolutely superb.

Do you have any plans to run an MSX article in the future? It's a really interesting machine and I'd love to be able to read more about it.

Aaron Reid

Nice to hear you enjoyed the *Metal Gear* feature, and your letter has raised an interesting point about why some people use ROMs in the first place. The likes of *Metal Gear* on the MSX aren't exactly easy to come by, so it's unsurprising that so many people look for alternatives. However, while many would argue that these games are so old it would be impossible for a company to profit from them, seeing that *Metal Gear* is being released for mobile phones we're sure that Konami would beg to differ. As for the MSX, it's on our 'To Do' list.



It's like the *Antiques Roadshow* round here, discovering lost gems.

SINS OF THE FATHER

Dear games™

In issue 27 you did a two-page spread about *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, which I was very pleased with, as it's one of my favourite Konami games of all time. In the retrospective, you state that the player takes "the roles of Lance and Bill".

That's not actually true (at least not in the US version, which is the version I assume you're basing your article on). The characters you controlled were named Sully and Jimbo and happened to be the descendants of Lance and Bill respectively. Yeah, I know I'm nitpicking, but wanted to set the record straight.

Regardless, you write a brilliant magazine every month. Keep up the good work,

Kevin Leung, Silicon Knights Inc.

Ahm, well, yes, we're guess you're right there. What happened, you see, was that while the page was being written, there was a small military coup in the street outside, and we got so carried away in the excitement that we accidentally typed 'Lance and Bill' instead of 'Sully and Jimbo'. And that's the truth. Anyway, where's the sequel to *Eternal Darkness*, eh? We'll get our facts straight when you make the game we've been looking forward to so much…

ROCK OF AGES

Dear games™

Have you ever thought of doing a small feature on really old games and companies such as Grandstand (who did tabletop games) and maybe even Parker Brothers who released Merlin in 1979? Those were among my first introductions to gaming, although Merlin isn't what most people would think of a videogame, as it had no screen.

Pete Wilstone

There's been quite a lot of interest in the Grandstand tabletop games recently, so it's something we're researching to see if there's enough information for a feature. We even remember that multicoloured Simon game being quite popular once upon a time. Now that really was a long time ago…

GET GEAR

Dear games™

Being fairly new to the retro scene and eagerly anticipating the release of the next-generation handhelds, I was wondering if you would ever cover the Sega Game Gear. If you have covered it in an earlier issue, I would appreciate it if you could print any websites where I can find more information about it, or where I could even buy one.

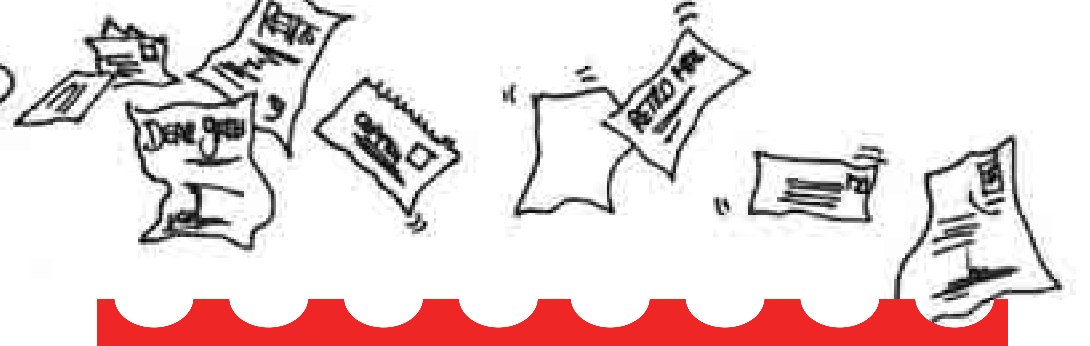
Mark Penton

Sorry, but we've already covered the Game Gear back in issue 14. Don't worry, though, as you can head over to our retro website at www.totalgames.net/retro and read about it there. As for buying the machine, your best bet





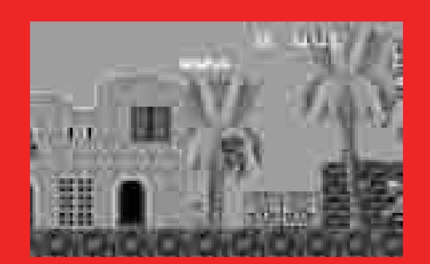





STAR LETTER

Dear games™
When my son was four years old (14 years ago) the first game we ever bought was *Alex Kidd* for the Mega Drive. It was the greatest game in the world, in my opinion, and a lot of housework remained undone as we worked our way through it together.

Last month the inside back page of games™ mentioned Janken. I couldn't believe it – and couldn't wait for the next issue to come out. I rushed home with games™ and the shopping, abandoned the housework and settled down hoping to read about *Alex Kidd*, but was heartbroken to find that our favourite game wasn't actually featured. Come on, guys – give our hero more coverage please.
Hazel Rea



Ah, now you see, the back page isn't meant to be a preview of what's coming in the next issue – that's what the 'next month' page is for. But don't worry, you're not the first person to get caught out by our chin-stroking, 'is-it-art?' back page. We have covered Alex Kidd a little in the past, but if enough readers want to see more about the Sega hero then we could give him more space. In the meantime, let us try to make up for your disappointment with a free retro T-shirt.


Will we ever see *Sonic CD* on a modern console? Anyone…?

is to try places like GameStation and eBay. You should be able to get hold of a Game Gear and a couple of games for a decent price.

HEDGEHOG HEAVEN

Dear games™
Just wanted to say that I absolutely adored the *Sonic Mega Collection* article that appeared in issue 28. I had my first encounter with that loveable little hedgehog when I was 11 years old, and it was the start of a beautiful relationship that has lasted many years. We've had our ups (*Sonic CD*) and we've had our downs (*Sonic Heroes*) but throughout it all, I've remained a loyal follower of the slipper-wearing hog.

It's been ages since I've played the original 2D games (I sold my Mega Drive a long time ago) so the ability to now buy them for my PS2 is fantastic. Do you know if Sega has any other similar Sonic compilations planned for the future? I'd love to play *Sonic CD* again.
Rachael Harris

Glad you enjoyed the feature. Unfortunately, we're unlikely to see another *Sonic* collection for some time as the majority of games were covered in the Xbox and PS2 compilations. Another problem is that many of the missing games would be rather tricky to convert onto the current systems. Still, the package that's available is a pretty good buy and is bound to please most fans.

CHEAP AS CHIPS

Dear games™
I've got myself a mint condition copy of *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past* for the SNES. It comes complete with the box, manual, map and still has the elusive hint book! The box is a tiny bit banged up but everything else is simply perfect. To make up for the box's imperfection, there's the little round Nintendo sticker that's still intact – not a bad buy for £25. Sorry, but I just had to tell someone.
Kai

That's a very nice find. One of our local shops has been trying to sell a sealed copy of *A Link To The Past* for about six months. Although this probably has something to do with the £65 price tag…












It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£10-20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£15-40



ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£15
Atari Jaguar	£20-30

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (depending on model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (depending on model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35



MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£50-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (depending on model)

NEC

PC Engine	£60-90
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£115-220
PC Engine GT	£80-180
Super Grafx	£200-300



NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-150 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-40
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20-30
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£10-25
Mega CD	£40-60
Sega 32X	£30
Sega Nomad	£75-150
Saturn	£20-35 (depending on model)
Dreamcast	£20-40

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo-Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system)	£70 (prices for multi-slots are higher)
Neo-Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo-Geo CD	£125-175
Neo-Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo-Geo Pocket Color	£30-50

Right then, you've just picked up a second-hand console and are looking for some classic games to play on it. The only problem is, you're not too sure what to buy. Hopefully, we can help.

Every month we'll be printing the current prices for a range of top games for a particular system. Of course, this is subject to change, so don't be surprised if you manage to get one for less (or, unfortunately, more). This month we're taking a look at some of the best first-party games available for the SNES.

Super Mario Kart

Estimated Price: £15-25 mint (£3-10 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
For many, the original *Super Mario Kart* remains the greatest version of the game and even today displays all the qualities that made it such a wonderfully addictive title. Terrific visuals, cunning track design and an excellent range of characters all helped to make Mario's first karting outing something to remember. It still goes for a relatively high price in mint condition.



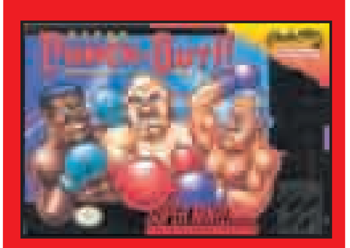
Super Metroid

Estimated Price: £15-35 mint (£4-10 cartridge only)
Developer: Sonic Team
Released in a lavish box that came complete with a walkthrough guide, *Super Metroid* still fetches a decent price in pristine condition. Like many SNES titles, though, cartridges can be picked up relatively cheaply and if all you want to do is own the game then this is your best option. Regardless of how much you pay, *Super Metroid* remains one of the greatest games on the system.



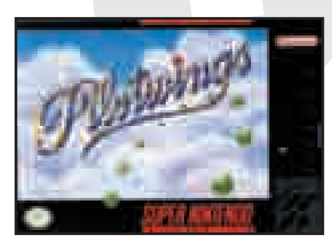
Super Punch-Out

Estimated Price £16-25 (£6-12 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
Despite its relative rarity and the fact that it's a superb follow-up to the NES original, *Super Punch-Out* can still be picked up for a decent price. Featuring some fantastic cartoony visuals, challenging gameplay and great characters, *Super Punch-Out* was a worthy sequel to the original NES classic and a superb game in its own right. Like *A Link To The Past*, cartridges still cost a bit, so shop around.



Pilotwings

Estimated Price: £10-25 mint (£3-8 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
If you're looking for total relaxation then Nintendo's *Pilotwings* is the perfect solution. Forget listening to whale songs or practising yoga, a spell in *Pilotwings*' glider brings you perfect bliss. It's quite hard to find nowadays, but it's not in as much demand as other SNES titles, so the price remains fairly low.



F-Zero

Estimated Price £6-12 (£2.50-5 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
Practically every SNES owner and his dog owned a copy of Nintendo's excellent futuristic racer, so now it's incredibly cheap and easy to find. It might look a little basic nowadays – especially when compared to its Cube successors – but *F-Zero*'s satisfying gameplay remains intact, and whether you're looking to complete your collection or just want the cream of the crop, *F-Zero* is an essential purchase.



Star Wing

Estimated Price: £5-9 (£2-5 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
It's starting to show its age now, but there's no denying that Fox McCloud's first adventure is still great fun to play. Like *F-Zero*, it's extremely easy to track down and you'll be able to find it in most second-hand game stores (and on eBay). Even a boxed copy can be picked up for less then a tenner, so if you're looking for cheap games for the collection, go with *Star Wing*.



Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

Estimated Price: £25-60 mint (£8-20 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
Yoshi's Island was one of the last games released for the SNES so its price has remained high. Fortunately, like the Saturn's *Radiant Silvergun*, copies often appear on eBay – as long as you don't mind forking out the cash, it's easy to pick up. Another way to play this excellent platformer is to pick up the just as good (and near identical) GBA version.

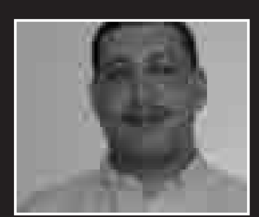


The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past

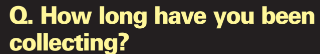
Estimated Price: £18-50 mint (£5-20 cartridge only)
Developer: Nintendo
For some, Link's first 16-bit adventure is his best game. It's also kept a very high price and mint sealed copies can go for as much as £50. Even an unboxed copy will set you back a few quid, but if you want to play one of the greatest SNES RPGs ever made, you really have no other option – unless you buy the GBA version, of course.



THE ULTIMATE COLLECTION



FEAR NOT, RETRO LOVERS – WE'VE GIVEN THE DREAMCAST A WIDE BERTH THIS MONTH. INSTEAD, WE'VE TRACKED DOWN GARRON TUNGATE OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE. THE 36-YEAR-OLD RETAIL MANAGER HAS A VAST COLLECTION OF CLASSIC MACHINES AND HAS A PARTICULAR PASSION FOR SHMUPS…



Q. How long have you been collecting?

Well, I have items in my collection from when I was a kid – things like *Astro Wars* and some Grandstand and Nintendo handhelds, as well as a few other systems. About nine years ago I wanted to play *Truxton* on the Mega Drive again, so I went to a couple of car boot sales and second-hand shops and saw loads of retro games and systems. I started to buy them again to play and it all started from there

Q. How did your interest in collecting come about?

When I'd collected several systems I started to think about other games that I wanted to play again. I began using the internet to look for other items and collectors like myself and soon started to swap emails with other gamers who shared the same passion I did. I'm still in touch with many of them today.

Q. How much is your collection worth?

I'd rather not say. However, I'll leave it by saying that I have a great house alarm.

Q. What's your most prized possession?

It's hard to pin a particular one down, but a few of my favourites include my *Metal Slug* games for the Neo Geo AES, a *Time Pilot* PCB board and my lovely PC Engine LT.

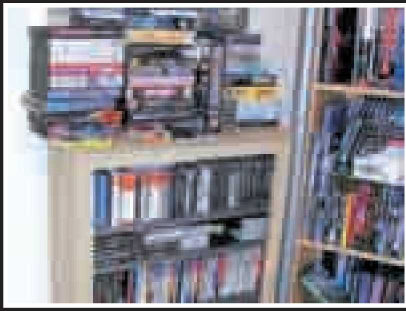
Q. What's the most highly desirable item that you haven't tracked down yet?

Judgement Silversword, a shmup for the Wonderswan system. The other games I want I'll get in time, as they constantly pop up on eBay and most online stores. The next system I'm after is an FM Towns Marty to play *Truxton 2* on, as I have the actual game, but nothing to play it on.

Q. What sources do you use and have you ever found a real bargain?

The best bargain was at a car boot sale where I bought a Neo Geo AES and three games for £35. That was about five years ago and while I've had other good finds in the past, that's the one that stands out the most. Other sources are people I've been trading with over the years in Japan and the US, although it's got easier since the arrival of eBay and various forums. Retro events like Britmeet were a good source for trading with other collectors and you could also get great bargains in their auctions. Finally, shops like Retro X (sadly, no longer trading) were also good for finding the odd rarity.

Q. What's the most money you've ever spent on a single item?







That's, well, that's a pretty darn comprehensive hardware collection right there. Good work, that man.

A couple of large purchases spring to mind. My PC Engine LT went over the £500 mark, the *Metal Slug* AES games all cost over £300, while *Ironclad* for the Neo Geo CD cost £160.

Q. What does your significant other think of your collecting?

I think that my wife understands it a lot more now as it's become more mainstream. She's been great from the very beginning, though, and has always made constant trips to pick up parcels and packages from the post office throughout the week, while becoming a car-boot widow at weekends. Fortunately, spending has become reduced, as there are only a select few items that I'm now after.



We don't see daylight for days as we tackle Archer Maclean's arcade cabs.

NEXT MONTH IN RETRO

We're off to visit Archer Maclean with the intention of playing as many of his 150 arcade machines as possible. Who knows, we may even find time to write the rest of the Retro section too…

See you then!

ON SALE 21 APRIL


eMag

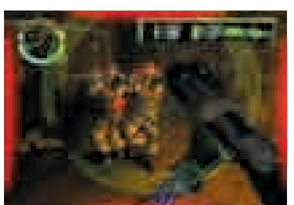
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



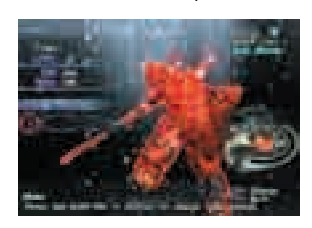
PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

So what happened here then? Reading reviews elsewhere makes us wonder if people are playing the same game as us – all we got from *Snowblind* was a bland and repetitive shooter with very little appeal. And to think it's been compared to *Halo 2*…



SHADOW HEARTS: COVENANT

Pleasant surprises are always welcome, so the fact that Midway's *Shadow Hearts* sequel is so enjoyable is something we're very happy about. It might not be as polished as the *Final Fantasy* series but it's certainly a lot of fun.



SUIKODEN IV

On the other hand, we've been left somewhat disappointed by the first *Suikoden* game to hit European shores. Whereas the previous games have been great, this fourth effort left us cold. If you've never played *Suikoden* before, importing is the only way.





PLAYSTATION2

Manufacturer Sony
UK Launch Date 24 November 2000
Media 4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £104.99

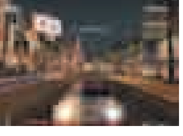
The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. Thanks to Sony's reputation, though, it's still the most popular console around – a trend that will no doubt continue now that the remodelled, one-quarter-size PStwo is available.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

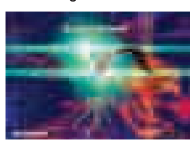
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix	Music games have never needed as much skill as this
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	In-House	A fine example of adventuring; well worth the wait
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	EA takes the arcade racing genre to new heights
Dark Chronicle	Sony	In-House	In-depth RPGs don't come much bigger than this
Devil May Cry 3	Capcom	In-House	As tough as nuts, but certainly the highlight of the series
Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness	Atlus	Nippon Ichi	Like your RPGs practically endless? Then this is for you
Gran Turismo 4	Sony	Polyphony Digital	Worth the wait, thankfully – even without the online mode
Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	Bigger, badder, better – a great *GTA* experience
Gregory Horror Show	Capcom	In-House	Bizarre, twisted and yet oh-so enjoyable
Hitman: Contracts	Eidos	Io Interactive	Silent but deadly – a real killer of a game
Ico	SCEE	In-House	Possibly the most beautiful game ever made
Katamari Damacy IMPORT	Namco	In-House	One of the quirkiest action puzzle games around
NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports Big	The daddy of basketball games – no contest
Prince Of Persia: Warrior Within	Ubisoft	In-House	The Prince returns, darker than ever before
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House	The only football game worth owning, period.
Rez	Sega	UGA	Deceptively simple – draws you in before you know it
Silent Hill 2	Konami	In-House	The high point of Konami's survival horror series
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG	The *Tony Hawk's* of the snowboarding world
Tony Hawk's Underground 2	Activision	Neversoft	Better? Again? How does Neversoft keep doing it?
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	In-House	By far the deepest 3D fighting game around today

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

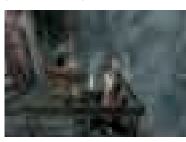
Gran Turismo 4
Some disappointments as far as improvement goes, but still one of the greatest driving simulators around today.



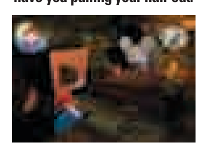
Rez
A game that stands the test of time, proving that Sega can make great games when it isn't reining itself in.



POP: Warrior Within
What do you mean, you don't like the music? Honestly, there's no pleasing some of you these days…



Gregory Horror Show
As unique a game as you're likely to get from Capcom, with puzzles that'll have you pulling your hair out.



Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness
One of three great titles from Nippon Ichi that all but crown it the king of turn-based RPG development.









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE



XBOX

Manufacturer Microsoft
UK Launch Date
13 March 2002
Media
4.75-inch DVD Disc
Current Price £99.99

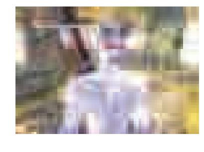
Despite a slow start, the Xbox has swiftly become one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded, although the Xbox is far more accessible to gamers than most PCs. The 'special edition' Crystal console is now widely available from stores across the country.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

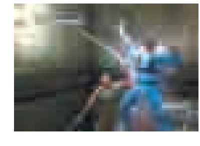
Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	Criterion Studios	The game that redefines the arcade racing genre
Chronicles Of Riddick: Butcher Bay	Vivendi Universal	Starbreeze Studios	A fine example of great gameplay and top-notch graphics
Def Jam: Fight For New York	Electronic Arts	Aki Corporation	Ultra-violent fighting has never looked so good
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	Ion Storm	Freestyle adventuring with a decent first-person twist
Fable	Microsoft	Big Blue Box	A special breed of RPG – well worth experiencing
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North	The best versions of *GTA III* and *Vice City*, without a doubt
Halo 2	Microsoft	Bungie	The Xbox's most popular game just got even better
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	Smilebit	Cel-shading at its very best and a soundtrack to die for
Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare	One of the best *Star Wars* games ever made
Ninja Gaiden	Microsoft	Tecmo	Damn tough, but a great example of style and gameplay
Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath	Electronic Arts	Oddworld Inhabitants	A complete change of pace for Oddworld that really works
OutRun 2	Sega	Sumo Digital	Stunning reproduction of a great arcade game
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations	As comprehensive an online racer as you're ever likely to find
Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo	Scarier than anything else out there today
Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy	Midway	In-House	An enjoyable and solid psychic blasting romp
Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow	Ubisoft	In-House	An essential update to the hugely popular Live game
Rallisport Challenge 2	Microsoft	Digital Illusions	Does everything you'd want from a rally game and more
Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	In-House	Even better than the original, with a storming Live mode
Star Wars Battlefront	Activision	Pandemic Studios	A great game first, a great *Star Wars* game second
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos	Ion Storm	*Splinter Cell* for the Middle Ages? Sounds good to us…

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN…

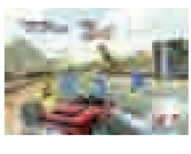
Fable
Perhaps not as wide-reaching as it could have been, but still a gripping chunk of RPG action.



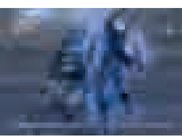
Psi-Ops: TMC
Hugely overlooked by everyone, Midway's psychic blast-'em-up is as enjoyable as it is messy.



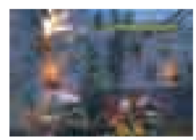
OutRun 2
An arcade racer of a different calibre, with the emphasis on skill and practice rather than thrills.



Ninja Gaiden
One of the hardest games we've played in a very long time, but still one that kept us plugging away to the end.



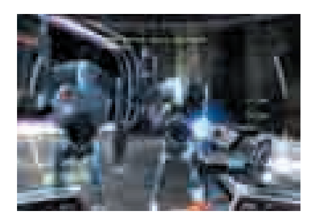
OW: Stranger's Wrath
A complete diversion for the *Oddworld* franchise that manages to offer plenty of laughs and action together.



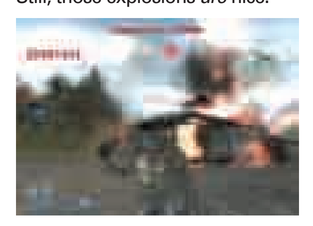




STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO
Falling somewhat short of the '*Rainbow Six* meets *Star Wars*' expectations that we had for it, *Republic Commando* has too many niggling flaws and strange AI behaviour problems to make it anything more than a distraction.



MERCENARIES
We've all seen the advert – 'Blow stuff up. Blow it up again' – and so on. Sounds shallow, doesn't it? Well, it is. Yes, blowing everything to bits is incredibly satisfying but when there's nothing underneath, it all falls a bit flat after a while. Still, those explosions *are* nice.



DEAD OR ALIVE ULTIMATE
Let's face it – the only real incentive to buy this is for the online mode. Really. With that in mind, though, how much you enjoy it depends on your internet connection – the lag factor can really drag those bosoms down.



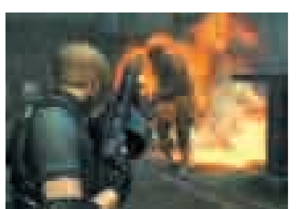
ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-



RESIDENT EVIL 4

Oh, the arguments that Capcom's *Resident Evil 4* has caused among the **games™** team – should it have been a nine or a ten? Regardless, there's no denying it's an essential title for the Cube – and, sadly, there's so few of those at the moment.



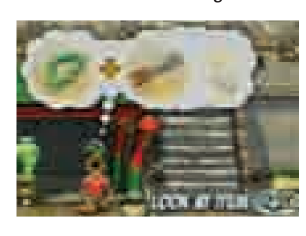
TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

We've never understood why some people hate *TimeSplitters* – especially since this third instalment improves the series no end. Admittedly, the emphasis is still on rock-solid multiplayer, but that doesn't stop it being great.



NEIGHBOURS FROM HELL

It would seem we're among the few people who really enjoyed JoWood's comical puzzler, but the release of a console version that combines the first and second games (and for only £20 at that) should change all that.





GAMECUBE

Manufacturer Nintendo
UK Launch Date
3 May 2002
Media
3-inch Optical Disc
Current Price £79.99

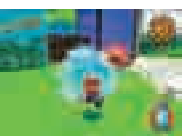
Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. While third-party support is dwindling, it's the first-party releases that really offer some quality gaming. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games ever, so missing out isn't really an option if you love videogames.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer	Comment
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	In-House	The only game to keep us playing for a full year
Alien Hominid IMPORT	03 Entertainment	The Behemoth	Hardcore 2D blasting with a sense of humour
Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights	Scary in a different sense – very intriguing
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Amusement Vision	Sega does it again with a brilliant retro remake
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubisoft	Natsume	Highly absorbing – the *Animal Crossing* of farming games
Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House	Hard as nails and incredibly addictive
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	Camelot	Golfing fun without the need for Tiger Woods
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	In-House	A grower, by all accounts – take your time and enjoy
Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Nintendo	In-House	Another great 3D outing for our favourite female bounty hunter
Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	Hugely entertaining and challenging at the same time
Pikmin 2	Nintendo	In-House	More flowery fun for those of a patient disposition
Resident Evil 4	Capcom	In-House	Reinvention on a scale that brings the series back to life
Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House	The leader of the pack when it comes to swordplay
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House	Not perfect, but still a very fine Mario adventure
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Amusement Vision	Monkeys and balls – what more could you want?
Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	In-House	An absolute beast of an RPG that will dominate your life
Viewtiful Joe 2	Capcom	In-House	A fine return for our favourite side-scrolling superhero
Wario Ware: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	In-House	A party game that'll have you rolling in the aisles
Zelda: Four Swords Adventures	Nintendo	In-House	The perfect excuse to have your friends round all the time
Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House	One of the many reasons to own a GameCube

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

Super Mario Sunshine
■ **Ignore the critics – some slightly annoying elements aside, *Sunshine* is a great platformer in its own right.**



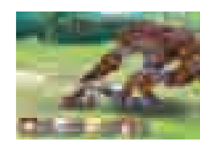
Pikmin 2
■ **Deeper, darker and more challenging than the original, but still retaining all the charm that made it such fun.**



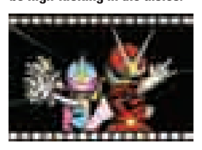
Paper Mario: TYD
■ **Several months on and we still haven't completely cleared out Mario's wafer-thin RPG. And that's not because we're lazy.**



Tales Of Symphonia
■ **The very definition of an epic RPG, with a combat system that's uniquely different from the norm.**



Viewtiful Joe 2
■ **Just as good as Joe's first outing, if not better. Fans of old-school fighting action will be high-kicking in the aisles.**









EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE

GBA

Manufacturer Nintendo **UK Launch Date** 22 June 2001
Media Flash Cartridge **Current Price** £69.99



Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available in a variety of colours.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising	Nintendo	In-House
Astro Boy: Omega Factor IMPORT	Sega	Treasure
Boktai: The Sun Is In Your Hand	Konami	In-House
Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Square Enix
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	In-House
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
Harvest Moon: Friends Of Mineral Town	Ubisoft	Natsume
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	AlphaDream
Mario Golf: Advance Tour	Nintendo	Camelot
Mario Vs Donkey Kong	Nintendo	In-House
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
Shining Force: Resurrection Of The Dark Dragon	THQ	Sega
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubisoft	Crawfish
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
Wario Ware Inc: Mega Microgame$	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
Legend Of Zelda: The Minish Cap	Nintendo	Capcom

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

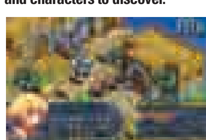
Advance Wars 2: BHR
■ **Our patience is slowly wearing thin – where's the DS version, Nintendo? At least the last game is still as good as ever.**



Fire Emblem
■ **Another game that gets lots of play, not just because of its quality but also in preparation for the upcoming GameCube title.**



Final Fantasy Tactics Advance
■ **One for the long-haul – 300 missions to plough through and more than enough items, enemies and characters to discover.**



PC

Manufacturer N/A **UK Launch Date** N/A
Media 4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc **Current Price** £variable



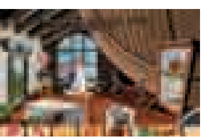
While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

TWENTY MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

Title	Publisher	Developer
Battlefield Vietnam	EA	Digital Illusions
Call Of Duty	Activision	Infinity Ward
City Of Heroes	NCSoft	Cryptic Studios
Deus Ex	Eidos	Ion Storm
EverQuest II	Sony Online Entertainment	Ubisoft
Far Cry	Ubisoft	Crytek
Football Manager 2005	Sega	Sports Interactive
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
Grim Fandango	LucasArts	In-House
Half-Life 2	Vivendi	Valve Software
Hidden & Dangerous 2	Gathering	Illusion
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	Novalogic	In-House
Pro Evolution Soccer 4	Konami	In-House
Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
Rome: Total War	Activision	Creative Assembly
Sam & Max Hit The Road	Activision	LucasArts
Sensible World Of Soccer	Sensible Software	Renegade
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	Firaxis Games
The Sims 2	EA	Maxis
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	Epic Games

WHY YOU SHOULD OWN...

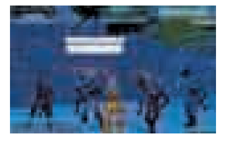
Sam & Max Hit The Road
■ **One of LucasArts' high points as far as point-and-click adventures go, so why it cancelled the sequel is beyond our meagre intellect.**



Sensible World Of Soccer
■ **The recent mobile release made us return to the original *Sensible*... and then we lost two days of our lives playing it.**



City Of Heroes
■ **Finally out in Europe, now everyone has the opportunity to be a superhero – albeit an MMORPG one clad in virtual shiny Lycra.**



NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

And so we reach that crazy time of year when various lucky members of the press get to attend 'pre-E3' events, showcasing what everyone will have at the big show. Whether or not we get invited to any is anyone's guess, but either way, we'll have something special for you.

MORE… REVIEWS

Even though it's still a month away, we can sense the onset of a period of both joy and pain, of pleasant surprises and bitter disappointment. Why? We couldn't say, but if you want to join us to examine reviews of games like *Championship Manager 5*, *TrackMania Sunrise*, *Unreal Championship 2*, *Rainbow Six: Lockdown* and the US PSP launch line-up, you'll see if we're right.

MORE… FEATURES

With the likes of *Forza* and *Gran Turismo 4* upon us, **games™** takes the opportunity to examine the meteoric rise of the racing genre – from pixellated motors to ultra-realism. And we head into the wilds of Horsham to meet up with The Creative Assembly, digging into the minds behind *Total War* and *Time Commanders* to find out whether success is as easy to achieve as it seems. Plus, Retro offers up a celebration of the greatness that is LucasArts and delves deeper into some of the greatest adventure games ever created.

Please note: Due to circumstances beyond our control, we can't guarantee that the next issue will actually contain all these things. But it will definitely have *something* in it. Probably words. And some pictures.




NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
From the vastness of war to the plight of a single warrior – The Creative Assembly's next project looks to combine both and offer an experience like no other. games™ goes hands-on to bring you everything you need to know.
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Making Contact

There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:

games™, Highbury Entertainment, Paragon House, St Peter's Road, Bournemouth, BH1 2JS

However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the internet. Email us at this address: **gamestm@paragon.co.uk**

Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum?

Step One:
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

Step Two:
Type the following into the browser window: **www.gamestm.co.uk**
You will arrive at the **games™** website. Nice, isn't it? Click on the 'forum' icon near the top of the page. If you're a first-time visitor to the forum you'll have to register before you can post. Just click 'register', fill in a few details (such as a username and password) and you're away.

Step Three:
Ha! There is no step three. It's that simple. Just choose which thread looks most interesting then post your deepest, darkest thoughts (preferably concerning gaming) in there. There's even a dedicated letters thread where you can post anything you'd like to see on these pages.

games™ reserves the right to edit letters for space and/or clarity. The views expressed in letters on these pages are those of the correspondents and not **games™**. If you want a healthy debate, we'll see you on the forum…

I READ YOUR feature on in-game advertising [issue 29] with great interest. However, while I am cautiously optimistic about the impact it could have short term, I strongly disagree with Josh Graff's opinion that the money would be used to try out new ideas and genres. Although in-game advertising could be great for real-world titles such as *Gran Turismo*, *Grand Theft Auto* and *Pro Evolution Soccer*, there could be a negative impact on fantasy titles such as *Halo*, *Metroid* and *Final Fantasy*.

For example, for Nike to advertise in the first set of titles is easy – Tommy Vercetti wears Nike Trainers, and *GT* and *Pro Evo* both have billboards sporting logos. But how could anything be advertised in the second set of titles? I can't see Cloud or Tidus becoming more nimble in battle as a result of wearing Nike trainers, and I don't think Master Chief or Samus could be seen sporting said trainers in their otherwise ridiculous outfits.

I can see a day when large amounts of advertising money are *required* for the development of a game rather than merely being a bonus, and so when any company is planning a new title it must consider the potential for inserting as much advertising as possible and design the game accordingly. As though creativity in the industry wasn't already suffering due to financial requirements, this could make the situation even worse, as innovative fantasy titles and the entire RPG genre are ignored due to a lack of in-game advertising potential.

I can also see a certain monster in the industry – one that churns out lots of mediocre real-world titles every Christmas and somehow sell loads – taking the bulk of the advertising money. I hope I'm wrong and that game advertising benefits the whole industry.
John Bilcliff

games™: We fear product placement as much as anyone else, but we can't see a time when developers compromise their games just to squeeze money out of advertisers. Nor can we envisage advertisers frittering precious spend on misplaced advertising. There's no doubt developers and advertisers will become increasing cosy bedfellows, but we hope both will work together in ways that won't tarnish either the games or the advertised products.

'RISE FROM YOUR grave and rescue my daughter.' Those were the words that I heard when I switched on the Mega Drive with *Altered Beast*. Fourteen years ago my parents paid £150 to allow me the privilege of playing my first computer game. And I was immediately taken back to that time after finishing Ste Cain's letter [issue 28].

I wouldn't consider myself a hardcore gamer, but I would probably be considered more dedicated than the group of people most readers would consider 'casual'. The irony is that I think it is we 'hardcore' gamers that have made a rod for our own back. Gaming 10 to15 years ago was a very expensive business. Fourteen years ago, £150 was a damn sight more than it is today, and the £44.99 my uncle gave to me to get *After Burner II* would probably be nearer £60-70 today.

So what did we do? We bought fewer games, played them more and complained like mad to try to get prices down. And they did

"AS IF **CREATIVITY IN THE INDUSTRY** WASN'T ALREADY SUFFERING DUE TO **FINANCIAL REQUIREMENTS**, INNOVATIVE FANTASY AND RPG TITLES COULD BE IGNORED DUE TO **A LACK OF IN-GAME ADVERTISING POTENTIAL**"



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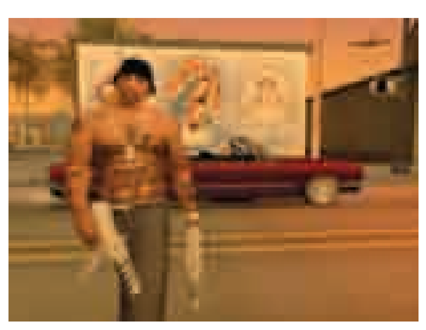
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Can anything be done to improve on the current generation of consoles? Does anything need to be done?



Should you be able to play the likes of *San Andreas* in shops? Or should it be kept away from the younger customers?

get lower. Over the last few years the price of gaming has plummeted. Anyone can nip into Argos these days and pick up the latest games for £30. This would not be the case without the aforementioned 'casual' gamer.

You can't have the best of both worlds. How many of you read Ste's letter and muttered some complaint about casual gamers? You can either keep gaming 'hardcore', where people like Ste don't exist, or you can accept, nay, embrace, the fact that the casual gamer means we don't have to go back to the days where we had to pay a lot more for our consoles and software.

David Whitelaw

games™: We couldn't agree more. The whole notion of labelling gamers as either 'hardcore' or 'casual' is a nonsense which is both unhelpful and unnecessary. Whether you get your kicks from *Katamari Damacy* or *EyeToy: Play*, or whether you buy one game per year or 20, shouldn't make a difference. Unfortunately, for a few small-minded individuals, it does.

IT'S OKAY TO like average games, isn't it? I've been playing videogames since the late Seventies and have seen my fair share of so-called average titles over the years. These are the sort of games that don't offer anything new, have many flaws and are generally ignored or forgotten. Due to finances and time constraints, I've tended to focus my gaming time on 'triple-A' titles and I've rarely been disappointed with those games.

But I did something different last month, I bought an 'average' game – *Galleon*. I'd been following *Galleon*'s development over the years, yet when it was released to a rather lukewarm reception I decided to leave it on the shelf. However, when it appeared in the sales I decided to snap it up and take a chance. And you know what? I've been enjoying it. Immensely. I can see the flaws, but am able to look past them and enjoy the game for what it's worth.

But do I tell anybody else? No. For some strange reason, I keep my thoughts to myself. After all, it's not the done thing to like a supposedly average game, is it? Imagine the derisory comments I'd get. Best to keep quiet. But why? I shouldn't be embarrassed. It's okay to like average games, isn't it?

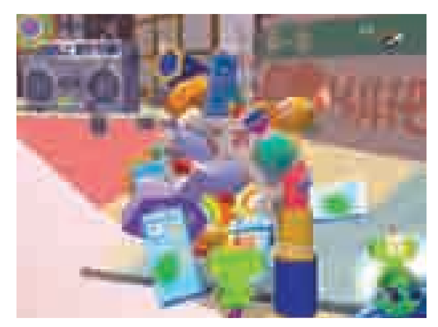
Peter Wilstone

games™: *Galleon*? Enjoyment? Are you sure? Our reviewer still hasn't fully recovered from playing it (though he has since developed a curious pirate fetish). Of course there's nothing wrong with liking games that aren't considered the finest examples of the genre. In fact, it's often a great way to cleanse your gaming palette, so to speak.

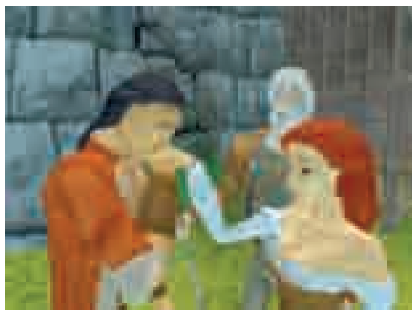
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Enough of what we think, this is where you lot get to show off your rapier wit to praise, criticise or mock the games industry



Are people right to be snobbish about games like *Katamari Damacy*? Liking it doesn't make you hardcore, you know.



Of course it's not wrong to like games that a lot of people think are average. *Galleon*, however…

I'M AMAZED. YOU'D think, what with the amount of flak the gaming world is currently getting from the media, the industry would pull together to show a united front, to prove that it's doing all it can. But no, it would seem that this is not the case.

Try my local games outlet a couple of months ago. Nine console stands, two of which were allowing gamers to try *Conflict: Vietnam* (a 16+ rated title) and various other age-restricted titles. I hadn't really considered the implications of this until I saw one kid – who looked about eight years old – playing *Mercenaries* and being egged on by his Dad. The kid was clearly loving every minute.

When I asked at the counter why they thought putting out demos of age-rated games was a good idea in an environment that's not age-controlled, no-one had any answer. And bear in mind that this was in a large, city-centre outlet of possibly the biggest game retailer in the UK and you can appreciate why I felt that this was somewhat concerning.

To be honest, without all the noise about under-age gaming that's been going on, I wouldn't have given it a second thought. Like retailers, I really hadn't thought about age restrictions on games. What chance do we have of successfully deflecting the criticisms of the media when stores allow access to games that youngsters shouldn't be allowed to play?

I don't want to sound like an old fart, because I would have wanted to play *GTA* when I was 12 without a doubt. But we're a hop, skip and a jump away from game shop prosecutions, and it makes me wonder if we can do more to stop things from going that far.

Nick Rolfe

games™: We're sure that most games retailers are pretty careful about monitoring their in-store game pods, but in this instance the legal guardian of the child gave permission for them to play the game – that's a pretty tough situation for anyone but a store manager to deal with.

ARE YOU EXCITED about the next generation? If so, why? Look at what we have now – three fast and capable machines that all meet their players' tastes very well indeed. There is no need for any new consoles for at least three years. Look at the development of consoles since the mid-

> "I DID **SOMETHING DIFFERENT** LAST MONTH, I **BOUGHT AN 'AVERAGE' GAME** – GALLEON. IT'S OKAY TO **LIKE AVERAGE GAMES**, ISN'T IT?"

Text Life

I've just got a mortgage. I guess I can kiss my collecting video games goodbye. Is there any counselling service that can help me through this difficult time?
games™: Should have bought a smaller house.

I've heard that due 2 problems with the production of the PSP it won't be released in Europe until the middle of the year. Do u know if there is any truth in this?
games™: It's looking more likely and Sony is keeping quiet about European launch details.

Please let me win a Nintendo DS.
games™: Sorry, we don't accept text bribes. However, if you want to nip down here with a big sack of cash we'll see what we can do.

Will Future Publishing send you to the magazine graveyard? Surely there is room for you and Edge. Long Live games™!
games™: We're unsure of Future's plans, but we'd just like to say that we love their work…

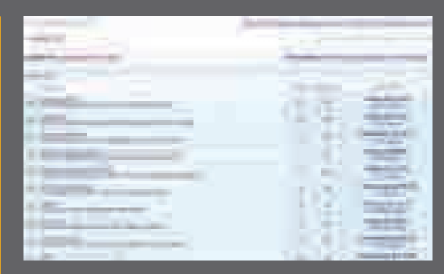
Your art editor deserves a chocolate biscuit!
games™: Many of you seem to agree, but she much prefers bottles of Newcastle Brown.

Cucumbers are 98% water.
games™: Robert De Niro's dad invented oxygen.

Woo Hoo! Penny's back for the second month in a row! Gotta love those white panties ;-) Although Squeeze Between My Cheeks is giving her a damn good run for her money despite costing £1.49 per minute more.
games™: We're not best pleased at the 'adult' ads reappearing. We've been assured that's the last of them. We'll see…

I watched "escape from new york" n noticed that the main character was called snake pliskin a cross between solid snake n iriqois pliskin from mgs2 coincidence?
games™: No, no coincidence at all – Hideo Kojima has spoken in the past about the influence of *Escape From New York* on his work.





FROM THE FORUM

LADIES THAT ARE GAME

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I LOVE FORUM pundits, with their ability to foresee what Sony and Microsoft's business advisors cannot. I literally wept with joy when I read a post by one of my favourites; they actually argued that a raccoon's tail was more innovative than anything offered by the likes of *Katamari Damacy*, *Ico* or *Rez*. That post was followed by a justification of piracy.

Why is there so little intelligent discussion of videogaming out there? Although gaming is a fledgling screen media, every analysis seems to be trite, to say the least. The problem, I'm sure, is that videogames don't lend themselves well to deep character development, or anything that other than a bashful fumble toward action set pieces.

Will videogames ever successfully go deeper than the adrenaline-inducing joy of control and action-reaction dynamics? I think *Halo 2*'s baffling story proved it an unlikely scenario.

But I'm not bashing the industry here – just gamers. Say what you will about EA or Microsoft's latest acquisition, their consumption and conglomeration, but videogames are the best they've been since *Super Mario Bros. 3*.

Will Luton

games™: Forums don't offer the most incisive opinions because it's hard to stop people posting with abandon. And behind the anonymity of an avatar and a witty log-in name anyone can write utter nonsense and get away with it. Obviously, there are places where gaming can be discussed maturely (cough, gamestm.co.uk, cough), but we agree that all too often the fun comes not from the highbrow exchange of views, but from some tool spouting rubbish in l33t talk.



If you'd like to line your pockets with £100 of Gamestation vouchers then send us a games-related letter crammed with sparkling wit and pertinent points. Extra marks will be awarded for neat handwriting. Marks will be deducted for moaning about Nintendo.

Eighties, starting with the NES and Master System; neither of these were upgraded until there had been large enough developments in technology to make a significant difference to not ony the aesthetics of a game, but the way it played (*F-Zero*, anyone?).

After the SNES and Mega Drive came the onset of 3D with the PSone, Saturn and N64, which really revolutionised the way we play but there were still problems with blocky graphics, fogging and poor animation. All of these problems were ironed out with the consoles we enjoy today.

There is nothing actually wrong with this generation. With the consoles of the mid- to late Nineties you knew games could be done a lot better but this is not the case now. We have pop-up-free visuals, excellent animation, accessible online gaming, and the overall quality of the games being released has never been higher. Where can you go at the moment other than a little spit and polish? Nowhere!

The big three are in a rush to release their latest incarnations in the next year or so; money is obviously the main reason, and because of this the overall quality will suffer. Why take lots of little steps to the next big thing when you could wait a bit longer and take that massive leap and really wow people?

Josh Baltazar

games™: You've pretty much answered your own question – there's money to be made. Then again, consumers always want bigger, better, faster more – and they always want it now.

Bondvillain2k
I happened across a large chunk of change a few months ago, so put it to my girlfriend that I spend it on something we could both enjoy – the usual romantic weekend somewhere exotic, nice meal, etc. but instead she wanted to get a PS2. I had no idea that she was into games, to which her response was to pull out her copy of *GTA: Vice City* that her ex-housemate gave to her. We've now been through *GTA III*, *Vice City* and *Beyond Good & Evil* and we're working on *San Andreas*. She's trying to find an N64 so we can play together, has begged me to bring back my Cube from my parents' house and is encouraging me to try a videogame-related MA course. She's a star. Has anyone else had similar relationship-strengthening experiences with videogames?

celery7
I wish my girlfriend was gaming-savvy. She used to play on the Mega Drive when she was younger but thinks 'they ruined it all when they brought in 3D' (an interesting point). I bought *Sonic Mega Collection* hoping to bring her back into the fold and it did to some extent, but she won't play anything else.

Jusatsushi
Videogaming has been an issue in every serious relationship I've had. Bah. Until joining this forum, I always believed women who were seriously into videogames were a myth. Like yetis only a bit sexier. Where do you find these rarities?

Folkestonia
My girlfriend's definitely not as enthusiastic about them as me, but if I'm playing on my own she will often join in or watch.

icksander
That's all you can ask/hope for. I was on a date tonight and we were doing the whole 'what interests do you have?' and I mentioned games, almost a little ashamedly as I knew what her reaction would be, and it was exactly that – 'not another game person? My brother never stops playing, yadda yadda'. I tried to defend my hobby, but I saw her eyes glaze over and decided to leave it at that.

CBx4
I know what you're saying, Icksander. As a rule of thumb, mentioning games on a first date is a big 'no-no' in my book. Unless she says it first, in which case you know you're onto a winner.

Primal
My wife has been playing games with me since we bought our SNES and Mega Drive about 12 years ago. She's always favoured Nintendo, and when the new *Zelda* game comes out I doubt I'll see her for a week.



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